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*ALASNAM'S LADY*

*LESLIE KEITH*







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# ALASNAM'S LADY.

*A MODERN ROMANCE.*

BY

LESLIE KEITH,

AUTHOR OF "SURRENDER," ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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“PRINCE Zeyn Alasnam in the days of old,  
Led by a dream, unearthed a secret stair,  
And, this descending, reached a vault, and there—  
So runs the tale Scheherazade told—  
He found great store of precious stones and gold,  
And eight pure diamond statues, passing fair :  
Yet was it shown him that a ninth, more rare,  
After long patient search he should behold.  
‘What is more precious than the diamond bright,  
And what more pure than is its liquid light?’  
Ponders the prince, as weary and sore tried,  
Homeward he hastes to seek his hard-won prize.  
He gains the vault wherein the treasure lies ;  
He turns the key,—and clasps his beauteous bride !”

A. COCKBURN.





# ALASNAM'S LADY.



## CHAPTER I.

"A man that fortune's buffets and rewards,  
Hast ta'en with equal thanks."

"So, as I told you, they are coming," he said again, after he had said other things.

They were standing on the balcony that projected from an upper window in a crowded street. In idle Spain one spends a great deal of time on the balcony. He leaned negligently against the window-frame; she—with hands clasping the iron bar of the railing—was looking down with grave eyes on the fluctuating crowd that crossed and recrossed the sun-flooded *Puerta del Sol*. There was a great life and movement there; the mingled murmur and hum of the city's voice rose urgently on the still, hot air. The sky above them was a deep, blinding blue, serene and unchanging; the

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great basin in the centre of the wide square where the water-carriers were busy, brimmed over; the splash of the falling silver, heard and then lost again, had coolness in the very sound of it.

"Is he like you?" she asked by-and-by.

He was a little time in answering, staring absently at a spot of vivid colour made by the loose crimson girdle of a passing *Aguador*, and she turned to look at him.

"I was considering whether there was any possible point where we came within speaking distance of each other," he said, smiling at her; "but I think not. He's a spoilt boy; he takes tremendous liberties. That means that I am much wiser, you know."

"Oh, of course!"

"Once, for a marvel, our fancy ran in the same direction, but not for long. No,"—he gave his head a little backward toss—"we are not alike; he is one of the fellows who are born lucky."

"What was the fancy that you shared? Tell me, Ralph."

She spoke softly and yet eagerly. To any one listening it would have been readily apparent that this young girl was accustomed to have her questions answered.

"We imagined ourselves to be in love with

the same woman." The light in his eyes was almost ironical, yet he was smiling at her. "Chester was in love with himself, I dare say; as for me, I found consolation not so impossible."

"Do you know, Ralph," she said gravely, looking down again on the passing tide of life beneath; "I think you are not glad these people are coming. I think you are displeased."

He shrugged his shoulders lazily—a gesture easily caught from the infectious habit all about him.

"One ought to love one's cousin," she said, with a fine little air of gravity that amused him.

"I don't find that commandment in the Decalogue."

"I shall love mine when I know her," she answered, as if the argument were final.

"And as for our cousinship," he went on, "it is so many times removed that we gave up the conundrum long ago. I don't suppose we should count kin out of Scotland; and I only let him claim the honour when he is decently civil and respectful."

"Well, it's very nice of him to come all this way to see you. If Bell offered me a visit, I shouldn't be so grumpy."

"Mrs. Henshaw isn't my cousin, I thank the gods," he said fervently; "nor the fair Miss

Henshaw either! Will you tell me why they should come here?"

"Why should they not come here? Madrid isn't ours."

"Because we don't want them," he made bold to answer. "They have the whole of Europe for a happy hunting ground; why should they choose to descend on this special corner?"

"Perhaps they have been in every other corner already."

"I think we are very comfortable without them," he went on, unheeding. "We have no eligible young men for Mrs. Henshaw's investigation. Spanish grandees are out of the running. Worth's masterpieces and Miss Henshaw's smiles will be wasted here. Chester may amuse himself possibly—at our expense. He is a frivolous youth, and he will insist on our all being frivolous to keep him company. His object in life is to be amused. Are you prepared to minister to it, Di?"

"What a lot of words just to express that you are cross!" she said, laughing. She had a happy laugh. "As for me, I'm glad they are coming; we are stupid, we are dull, we want more life." She put out her two hands as if to welcome it. "A little bit of the outside world won't come amiss; I am quite ready for it."

"You will find it a bore."

"Oh no." She shook her head; it was his way to talk like that.

"Before you have been five minutes in their company the women will have told you—not in so many words, but all the same, very plainly—that the cut of your sleeve is antiquated, and your hairdressing all wrong, besides other unpalatable truths."

"Well, I can alter my sleeve."

She held up her arm and looked seriously at the loose white drapery falling away from her wrist.

"I wouldn't advise you," he said lazily. "Don't alter anything, Di."

"One can always learn, even though one is a provincial young person. Wait and you will see. You and the father won't need to be ashamed of me."

"That I think we may venture to promise."

He spoke carelessly. He had plucked a leaf from a shabby myrtle that grew in a green tub, and was absorbed in watching its destination as it floated over the balcony. She paid no heed to his assurance—too certain of it, perhaps, to value it.

"You haven't told me your cousin's name," she said, after a pause.

"Chester—Felix Chester."

She smiled.

"You think the last name is everything. Now to me there is a great deal in a Christian name. Why should people take refuge in initials? Your *a*'s and *j*'s and *p*'s mean nothing; they lock up all the poetry."

"Andrew, James, Peter. I fail to discover the poetry."

"You have it in Felix. Your cousin is lucky in his name, at any rate."

"And you in yours, Di." A quick ear might have detected a faint, pleasurable lingering on the little syllable. "If they had dubbed you Mary-Ann or Sarah, I'd have declined to guide you in the way you should go."

"I wonder they didn't call me after mamma. Di is all very well just now; but in a year or two I must be Deonys. A grey-haired wrinkled Di would be absurd—wouldn't it?"

"Not if that Di were you."

"Oh, I shall always be Di to you and the padre," she said simply.

"Even when you are a sprightly and venerable version of Miss Piper?"

"Oh, you may laugh," she said, with that little air of petulance he loved to provoke; "but you won't need to tell me when I am growing old."

"Then I must refrain from suggesting a

cap and blue spectacles as a graceful concession to your years? Mrs. Henshaw would take you for a model of Spanish fashions, and insist on Miss Henshaw's following suit. A cap, by the way, would suit her style of beauty well, only the idea would require to originate with herself. She is not like you; she refuses to take hints."

"Is she so very pretty?" Di asked, forgetting his badinage in her eagerness to learn all she could of this other girl.

"She used to be."

"Used to be? Is she not so now?"

"It would be dangerous to hazard an opinion; but, as she hasn't reached that stage you were darkly hinting at just now, I think we may venture to believe that she is still beautiful. Prince Alasnam, at least, thinks he has found the diamond statue," he said to himself, with an odd smile.

"I think it is dangerous to ask you any questions to-day," she retorted, turning away from him.

They were silent after that, while the sun travelled round, falling dazzlingly on the chalk-coloured fronts of the houses opposite, leaving them in a sharply-defined band of shadow. The crowd was beneath them now; but one or two beggars who made capital out of their sores,



were still visible, courting the heat, the light touching the warm brown of their rags. In the Puerta itself the coming and going had in nowise abated. Ralph Malleson from his corner commanded a lottery office, on the steps of which an agent was busy. It was the work of his idle moments to speculate on the numbers that agent would seduce with his blandishments, but the calculation grew laborious.

Presently a new sound invaded the square—a strain of broken music, and then a glitter of colour and of flashing points of light, as a regiment of troops crossed the wide, flagged space between the straggling mules, the whining beggars, and the few, the very few, who had work to do, and were doing it. The men marched at a quick, odd pace, as if they were hasting to action in the next street.

“Did you ever see such a shabby set of fellows?” said Ralph. “It’s impossible not to feel yourself a superior sort of animal when you look at them.”

She did not answer, as she bent forward to glance at the procession, which was over in a moment. She was thinking all the while that soon she should see Miss Henshaw. It needed no great exercise of her woman’s wit to know that this was the girl whom Ralph Malleson and Felix Chester had both loved, and whom

Mr. Chester—represented to be lucky in everything—had no doubt won. That bit of the story would soon unfold itself. This maiden— young for her years and quite unversed in love, as yet a high mystery to her—was sure that it could not be hidden from her. Love must have its own fair signs which any eye could read.

Ralph Malleson had forgotten his cousin, and was looking at the girl leaning idly over the iron railing. He had known her for a long time—almost the whole of her life and the best part of his own—but to look at her was one of the few things of which he never tired. Her profile was turned towards him, the full-lidded grey eyes were cast down, the flexible mouth was in grave repose. As he looked at her, he hoped idly that she would not be persuaded to change the fashion of her hair. It was a warm brown colour, and it was swept round her head in a single thick fold; he thought it the perfection of hairdressing.

The hum of the crowd came up to them, and made their own silence seem more curiously intense. Neither felt inclined to break it. Malleson reflected that he might not have many more opportunities of leaning against this particular window-frame and looking undisturbed at Deonys Ouvry, set clear and statuesque against a band of intense blue sky, and the

reflection was disagreeable. This widening of their circle would bring many changes, and his life had reached the point when change is but coldly received.

As for his companion, her mood was directly opposed to his: she was eager where he held back grudgingly, impatient where he was indifferent, young enough yet to feel sure that every new experience must be a happy one. He felt sometimes, with an unexpressed touch of sadness, how little they had in common, though they were such fast friends; not even the same standpoint from which to view their world. His glance travelled backward and hers onwards; for her as yet every breath of air was a caress, every stray sunbeam a promise of brightness to come.

Presently a little sound, very audible, came to them from the room behind the balcony. She turned and their eyes met. They both laughed.

"The heat makes the father so sleepy," she said.

"It lasts long this year."

"Your friends will feel it—after cold England."

"Not they," he answered lightly; "at least, if they do, they won't acknowledge it. It is quite worth grilling to make a little sensation,

and to come to Spain with the possibility of being detained is to make a little sensation, even if a very little one, in their set."

"They may come for better reasons than that."

"That reason is superlatively good. If you knew the immense importance of getting an inch ahead of your neighbours, you would not talk of the heat, Di."

"I think you are growing cynical," she said, severely.

"Not I! Ask the ladies if you don't believe me. They will tell you I am right. As for Prince Alasnam, we all know what his mission is."

"It's too hot for riddles," she said with dignity. "When you feel less cross you may come in and have some tea."

She passed him and went in at the low window.

"You want some tea too, eh, padre? Oh, what a lazy old father it is to sleep so long!"

She knelt down by the shabby sofa and lightly touched the grey hair spread out upon the pillow.

It was a noble face, you would have said if you had seen Mr. Ouvry open his calm, pale-blue eyes and look at his daughter. Deonys got her clear outlines from him, but there the

likeness ceased. There was a subtle difference in the expression of the two faces. Perhaps in the father's the eyes were too pale and cold, or the lines of the mouth too irresolute. It took Malleson a long time to make up his mind, but when he had made it, he came to the conclusion that Mr. Ouvry's face ought not to be called noble. At fifty or sixty a man's features are a tolerably correct index to his character, if you have the skill to read them aright, that is to say. Malleson believed himself skilful; but he told his thoughts to no one, and he got on excellently with Di's father.

"Some tea? Yes; I think I grow weaker every day, Di."

"Oh, it is the heat," she answered cheerfully. "It is September now; it can't last much longer."

"It seems to me as if it would go on for ever."

"I wish it might, except for you." She rose as she spoke and let down the long dark awning of the window nearest him. "It is my lot to wish all alone to-day—for the sun which you hate, and for the English ladies whom Ralph hates!"

"What is that?" said Malleson, catching the sound of his own name and stepping in.

"Padre, do you know what is going to

happen to-morrow?" she said, ignoring Mr. Malleson and his curiosity.

"To-morrow?" Mr. Ouvry sat up, looking sleepy and rather bewildered.

"I've had a telegram from Chester," said Malleson, seating himself lazily in an armchair. "They are at Burgos. We may look for them to-morrow about this time."

"Chester,—that's the young man they are bringing with them?"

"Yes," said Malleson gravely; "that just expresses it. I dare say Felix would put it the other way, though. I've no doubt he thinks he is bringing the ladies here."

"Ah," said Mr. Ouvry; and it is impossible to describe the amount of meaning with which that little word was charged. He rose gracefully, suppressing a yawn.

"I suppose we must exert ourselves, then. No more laziness, eh, Di? No more after-dinner napping. It's important that our friends should be properly received. They will expect to be amused."

"You may leave all that to me, sir. I'll initiate Chester, and he'll be charmed to act as guide to the ladies."

"Not at all," said the older man urbanely. "I trust I have not forgotten how to exercise hospitality, though of late my opportunities

have been few. Di and I will do our best; but you must help us," he added politely—he was always very polite—"we count on you, you know." If Malleson smiled behind his beard it was only at the demure look on Di's face.

"First, he must be more amiable, papa. If you knew how cross he has been! Oh yes, you may smoke; that will cure you." She gave him royal permission, for he had pulled out his pipe, and was looking at her deprecatingly.

It was an understood thing that he might smoke there as much as he chose, and he took large advantage of the understanding, but he never began without first asking her pleasure.

"Have you been down to the house?" Mr. Ouvry asked, daintily rolling a small cigarette between his long thin fingers. He had beautifully-shaped hands and filbert nails, signs of gentlemanly descent which he prized.

"Yes, an hour or more ago."

"What news? Anything going on?"

"Nothing special. The old story. Pi-y-Margall acting Cassandra as usual."

"It's about time for another *pronunciamiento*: this heat will get into the people's blood; we want a little revolution to clear the air."

"And your friends?" said Di, looking up

from the window where she was bending over a piece of work.

"They will expect it. Have you forgotten what I told you? A revolution and a bull-fight. Depend on it Mrs. Henshaw has bargained for these, whatever happens."

"She won't like the bull-fight." Di shook her head.

"My daughter has never seen one," said Mr. Ouvry gravely, as if he were imparting a mysterious piece of information. "It's a barbarous spectacle, a relic of heathendom. I don't consider such sights fit for ladies."

"Certainly not," said Malleson with vigorous emphasis.

"You know I never wanted to go to one." Di looked at them reproachfully. "As for revolutions, if Mrs. Henshaw stays here long enough she will grow tired of them."

"She may come in for something like a real one, though," said Malleson carelessly.

The men fell to talking politics in desultory fashion between the puffs of smoke, while Di's needle was pulled languidly out and in. Generally she listened with keen interest to these discussions of the political weather, into which every one falls instinctively in Spain, where the cone is perpetually hoisted in token of coming storm; but to-day there were other interests



which were more urgent. Malleeson's answers were given rather at random, for his mind was wandering too. He was looking half absently at the young girl, who had dropped her work and was staring at the bit of deepening sky above the opposite roofs, her thoughts not with them at all. He remembered her words to him a little while ago. There was in her attitude a calm and happy expectancy; she was waiting confidently for what life should bring her. She wore a white dress scantily and simply made, and it seemed to gather the failing light all to itself. Her figure was slender and very girlish as yet, but it gave promise of a fine and charming womanhood.

The room where these three people sat was shabby, almost melancholy, in the dusky twilight, and yet picturesque. Mr. Ouvry had *dilettante* tastes and a little money—nobody quite knew how much—and he had gathered some things worth having about him. Ralph Malleeson, too, had the instincts of a collector, and had dug up some treasures from the Rastro—the Wardour-street of Madrid. The floor was paved in rough blocks of black and white marble with a rug or two of good blended colour and design here and there spread over it. There was some genuine tapestry which relieved the blankness of one wall; and a good deal of

tattered and tarnished embroidery, of which Di was very proud, hung over the backs of the chairs and sofa. On a high bracket a jar of rough pottery held a handful of flowers and on the top of the old-fashioned piano, which had belonged to her mother, Di's birds twittered and sang in their gilded cage. The chairs were all comfortable and much worn; the books that lay about were old favourites; the newspapers were legion. The whole had an air of permanence: it was a room that had been lived in for a long time and had gathered associations about it. Behind the tapestry hanging was a little alcove, supposed to be Di's own special sanctum, but she did not often sit there; loneliness had no charm for her.

She rose and dropped her work.

"Here is tea at last. Oh, Concha!" she exclaimed with smiling reproach, "when will you learn that we don't like it boiled?"

"She wants to bring out all its medicinal qualities," said Malleson, rising and helping with the cups. "She has a tender regard for our health."

"She ought to know by this time." Di smiled at the old black-eyed serving-woman with a bright handkerchief tied under her withered chin. "You think we ought to drink nothing but coffee, eh, Conchita?"

"Ca!" said the woman, with true Castilian contempt. "If the señorita will poison herself with that stuff it is not for me to hinder."

She planted the tray before her young mistress and left the room with a majestic step.

"Now, I wonder what she thinks of us," said Malleson, helping himself to bread and butter. "A sort of lofty pity is her attitude towards me. 'What a poor thing is man,' she seems to say every time she condescends to look at me. As for you, Di, you are a misguided child on whom reason would be recklessly wasted. Do you think she pleads for our enlightenment in those tremendous prayers she makes in the Carmen? I met her coming home this morning, and if ever a woman looked at me from a pinnacle of conscious superiority, that woman was Concha."

Deonys smiled.

"She is very good; she goes every day, and I don't think we are the worse for her prayers."

"They haven't had much effect, seemingly. Perhaps it is our obstinate adherence to our errors that gives her such an air of unrewarded virtue."

"I won't have you laugh at her," said Di hotly. "I wonder what I should have done without her, with only two men to look after me when I was little!"

"She's been with us a long time," said Mr. Ouvry, stirring his tea. "As for her church going, I never interfere. Women like that sort of thing; it gives a colour to their lives, I suppose. She came to us when you were a mere baby, Di."

"Yes, when mamma died," said Deonys quietly.

No one spoke for a few moments. Malleson had noticed before that such rare mention as was ever made of the dead mistress of the house was made alone by Deonys; a simple word now and then showing that the lost mother was often in her thoughts. She seemed to have built up some little theories about her, and to hold to them, though her father never by any word of his added to her slender stock of knowledge. It was, perhaps, just this silence on his part that made the girl cling so tenderly to the very little she knew.

Malleson, too, had his picture of his friend's wife, whom he had never seen, and it was about as correct as most imaginary portraits. It was Di who sat as his model. He was sure she must be like her mother, because she was so unlike her father. He insisted very much to himself on that point—she was quite unlike her father. The dead woman must have been young and pretty, and full of charming little

ways that every now and then reappeared in her child; perhaps naturally gay, but more likely sad, and possibly unhappy. The sadness and unhappiness were after thoughts, no doubt unconsciously added to the mental outline after he had come to that conclusion we know of touching Mr. Ouvry's expression. But whatever she had been, had felt, or suffered, was all matter of idle speculation, for she had died long enough ago for every one seemingly to have forgotten her, except the little girl whose knowledge was of the slenderest.

At moments such as the present his instinctive impulse was always to comfort her for that old loss. It seemed, somehow, as if she had suffered more than other girls who were motherless. Yet her father was kind to her up to the limits of his nature; she, at least, found nothing wanting in his love. When next he spoke to her, it was to persuade her to go out with him. The swift descending darkness had already come, and the room was full of shadows, out of which Di's dress gleamed whitely. Outside the slow procession of the stars had begun.

She went obediently and put on her hat.

"Won't you come too, padre?" she asked, lingering at his side.

"Not to-night; I don't feel equal to the exertion; it's all very well for you young

people. Concha may bring the lamps and the *Imparcial*."

Malleson had waited almost impatiently for his answer. Yet a moment later he was ashamed of his impatience—of the persistent doubt that made him critical of every word spoken by this placid, polite gentleman.

"Shall I not stay and read to you, father?"

"By no means, my child. Don't think of me; go and enjoy yourself with our good friend," said Mr. Ouvry, with an air of making a very gracious concession.

"I believe you wanted to stay," said Ralph reproachfully. "You can have your father at any time, and yet you grudge this one hour to me. Our last, very likely."

"Is that why you are so cross? Do you mean to say good-bye to me to-night? Don't you know that I wanted to come?"

"Then where shall we go?" said Ralph with alacrity. "Let us make the most of our reprieve. To-morrow this arm and this tongue will be devoted to Mrs. Henshaw's service—a walking Baedeker or Murray—a Lempriere—a 'Things a lady would like to know'—a general encyclopædia of useful, or useless, information; that's what I shall become a few hours hence. Yes, we may as well take a sorrowful farewell of each other to-night. Our idle days are over."

"Will Miss Henshaw expect me to know everything—to answer all her questions?" said Di, in a troubled voice.

"Well, I think not," he answered gravely; "she has a special and particular guide of her own, you see, and she will be satisfied with his answers. You will be expected to walk on the other side of the lady and to carry her reticule, and generally to corroborate all my remarks. If you value your peace of mind, don't contradict me."

"I am too wise to do that," she said, with a mocking, mischievous smile. "Come down to the Prado, and see if the music will make you better."

They struck down a dark and narrow street, sombrelly shaded; the strip of sky seen between the tall, shuttered houses—pale, as if the heat of the day had burned the deep tone out of it—was pierced with a thousand points of light not yet at their brightest. The crowd, shaking off the languor of the burning hours, had all gone streaming down the broad Alcala. At a turn of the road they came suddenly on the Prado, brilliant with clustered lights and alive with music.

"How vulgar all that looks!" said Malleeson, stopping to stare at it. "What a hideous substitute for the stars those yellow earth lights

are! If people would only understand that music is never so perfect as when heard in the dusk. But they want to look at each other, I suppose, and to criticise the fit of their neighbours' gowns."

"We don't want to look at them. Let us go over there, under the trees."

He secured two chairs and carried them off to the far outskirts of the crowd, giving the little refreshment tables and the chattering groups about them a wide berth. A little timid breeze had sprung up; it made a small shivering sound in the green crown above them—a sharp rustle, no longer the full, soft murmur of leaves rich in May sap. It carried the music from them, pleasantly lessening its volume. The long, formal avenue behind them looked mysterious and ghostly, full of undefined shadows. As the wind swayed the branches one might have dreamt that an army was creeping stealthily onwards to surprise the gay, defenceless crowd yonder under the brilliant lights; or was it a company of sad old ghosts come back to haunt the scene of ended joys? It was an hour for any dreaming. The weary earth was growing cool now—resting after the burden of the day. There was a rare, reviving quality in the air; the mystery of the night brought a great sense of peace with it.



"What is her name?" said Di absently, after a long silence.

"Whose name?"

"I beg your pardon"—she started and blushed—"I was thinking of Miss Henshaw."

He laughed.

"I told you we should be effaced. The process has begun, it would seem. We are creatures of one idea. I was thinking of Miss Henshaw, too."

"If she is so very beautiful she must be worth thinking about."

He tilted his chair, and looked up at the sky between the leaves.

"I suppose people would call her a beauty; that is different from being beautiful, isn't it?"

"I don't know; it is too fine a distinction for me. I never saw a beautiful person."

What was it that made this grim Ralph smile so pleasantly to himself as he looked at the stars?

"She has an ugly name, though. Even you would fail to find any lurking poetry in Philippa."

Di's next question was asked rather hesitatingly.

"You said people thought her beautiful; don't you think her so?"

"I have seen faces that I prefer." He brought his chair sharply to the ground.

Another silence, while the champagne song from Don Giovanni rang out lustily, coming to them in their far-off corner in bursts of cheerfulness. The crowd was all in the distance—a dark mass, with little relief of colour.

“How sombre we are,” said Ralph, turning to her with a smile. “You and I might say with Jessica—

‘I am never merry when I hear sweet music.’

There has been nothing of the revel in our last hours of freedom.”

“Don’t talk like that, you stupid boy!”

“Well, then, in our last duet, if you like that better. After this we shall be a trio.”

“Listen,” she said, holding up her hand. “They have begun the ‘Prayer,’ from Freischütz.”

The wind carried the sounds partly from them, and only a broken strain or two—a high upper note like an ejaculatory cry or a wail of distress—reached them.

“Shall we go nearer?” he began; but Di started suddenly.

“What’s that?” she cried; and then she laughed, as a figure passed from out the gloom behind them. “It’s only a sugar-water boy! But it is rather ghostly here, after all.”

“Come here, you young villain,” said Ralph,

beckoning to the lad who carried a tray of glasses. "What do you mean by frightening the lady with your creeping, dodging ways? Will you have some, Di? You must take it on faith, then; it's too dark to be critical about the tumbler."

"Oh, it's you, José?" She nodded brightly to the boy, who grinned in pleased recognition. "His glasses are always beautifully clean, Ralph."

"Trade must be bad, surely, that he comes all this way for customers. Is this not a thirsty night, eh?"

"I saw the señorita," said José, pocketing the little bit of silver Ralph tossed him, and going off well pleased with his jingling tray.

"So that is one of your conquests, Miss Di. And I suppose you drank that sickly stuff just to please him? You are quite capable of it."

"No. I like it," she smiled. "Don't go just for a minute yet"—for he had risen; "wait till some of the people go away."

"With all my heart. I'll wait as long as you like," he said, sitting down again.

"Ralph," she turned to him earnestly, and laid her hand on his, "I want to ask you something."

"Well?"

"Are you——" She hesitated. "Does it really vex you that Miss—that these people are

coming—because, if it is to make you unhappy—I——”

“You would be sorry for me. But you needn't be sorry for me, Di.” He smiled as he laid his hand very kindly on hers. “As for compassion, it is Prince Alasnam who is to be pitied. What do you say? Shall we pull him out of this business, or shall we leave the rash youth to his fate?”

“How can I tell?” she said, with a touch of impatience, rising hurriedly. “It is time to go home.”

Nothing more was said; but when they passed under the gaslights she stole a look at him.

What she expected to read by that look I hardly know. She saw nothing that she had not seen always. A man, slightly built and spare, whose thirty-five years made him seem quite old in her eyes, dressed so carelessly as to be almost shabby. He was not handsome but his was a face that, having looked at once, you were inclined to look at again—a face with a history. The worn lines were not there for nothing. You knew instinctively that at some time or other this man had taken life hard, and had felt keenly. His eyes were dark, and their habitual expression slightly mocking. His hair was already streaked with gray, and rather scant at the temples; one lock had a

way of falling over his brow, and it was a trick of his to thrust it back which you soon grew to notice. He gave it an impatient toss as Deonys looked at him, and she wondered to what remembrance he was bidding defiance.

Somehow she knew instinctively that he had a sad background to his life, but what made up the sadness she neither knew then nor at any later time. She never asked or cared to know more than he chose to tell; she trusted him without thinking about it. He seemed to belong to her whole life; she could not remember the time when she had not known him. Madrid had been his home for more years than she could recall, and, except on brief visits to England, he never left it. Every one knew that he acted as correspondent to a London paper and that he added something to a small private income by other literary tasks; but his past history was a sealed book. If he had suffered he had strength enough left to keep silence; he did not choose to pose before the world as a disappointed man.

Di's thoughts were all given to that bit of his life—not the most tragic, she felt sure—that had to do with Miss Henshaw. He had cared for her once, did he care for her still? She had an immense curiosity on that point, and Malleson's face told her nothing.

## CHAPTER II.

"The gentleman is not in your books."

It was still early in the night when Ralph Malleson left Deonys Ouvry at her own home. He declined her invitation to supper, but he waited at the door till he knew her to be safely within. Standing in the darkness of the outer passage he heard her bright good-night to the portera, who thrust her head out of the little glass box as the girl went by; then her light footfall sounded on the stair, and presently there was the noise of a door opened and closed. After that—silence.

The night seemed darker and more dull to him now that his companion had gone, for on their way back from the Prado, Di had flung off her grave mood and been very gay and full of happy anticipation. He turned away and crossed the Puerta del Sol. It was slowly subsiding into quietness, except at one corner where there was a great café, and where the

lights flashing out threw a streak of brilliance across the pavement. He glanced in as he passed. It was still full of people, seated at the little marble-topped tables, whole families—down to the baby swaddled like a small Egyptian mummy—sipping sugar-water, eating ices, chattering or listening placidly to the shrill music of the band. At an angle near the window two old men were eagerly absorbed in a game of dominoes. He had come there once or twice with Di and her father on her birthday or other little festival, and on those occasions Mr. Ouvry had relaxed from his gracious dignity, and had condescended to take a suave interest in the tempting little dinner Malleeson had pleased himself by ordering. It was all for Di's pleasure, of course, even when the birthday was his own, and she had insisted that it should be kept with due ceremony, for to give this young girl pleasure had come to be a great object in his life—a life otherwise circumscribed enough.

Those had been pleasant days when his half-indolent plans for her amusement had so readily succeeded, but already they seemed to belong to the past. He was older than Di—old enough to have found out long ago what change meant, and to feel sure that after this widening of her outlook that was involved in the coming of

these strangers, the old narrow round would never more have power to satisfy her. He would have kept her, if he could, like the young princess who slept her charmed sleep in the wood, knowing nothing of the outer world but what reached her in her pure young dreams. He could not sympathize with her desire to become acquainted with the world at first hand. This wise Mr. Malleson would have had her to be content with what he chose to tell her of it. He wanted to keep her always young and innocent. Her child-like qualities were much too precious to be lightly perilled. In this masculine manner he would have settled everything, forgetting that, though Beauty sleeps through long ages, the waking kiss comes at last.

For himself, the very contemplation of change was hateful. He had fled long ago from the battle and struggle of life; he had stranded himself here where prizes and rewards were out of his reach, where society made no claims on him, where he might pass his days in an insignificance that was full of peace.

It was, perhaps, an ignoble aim enough, if aim it might be called—a narrow and limited horizon to set before him, but then no wider horizon would have had any inspiration for him. His time for ambition, for the wild



coursing of the blood through his veins, for the leap of pulses and the throbbing of eager desires was over, long over. The very thought of wearing a dress-coat and putting on tight boots and a white tie, of reburnishing his company manners, and practising once more the polite services and small attentions to etiquette that are the due of fashionable and pretty women, was irksome to this confirmed Bohemian, and drew from him a half-audible groan as he went quickly up the now dark and silent streets.

Thinking ruefully of these things, and—with a half-humorous smile that had no signs of heart-break in it—of his last meeting with Philippa Henshaw, he found himself at the northern outskirts of the city, climbing steeply up a sharp ascent. At the top of the hill there was a break between the tall houses. Here, on the outer verge of the city, the lights were few and the darkness vast: those deep abysses of gloom between the scattered dwellings were, he knew, but outlets to the great silent plain beyond; the blackness ahead of him concealed a formal avenue of stunted trees, that at mid-day gave but scant shade to the sandy road. There was now a wide, uninterrupted field of sky above him, no longer pale, but of the deep intense blue-black that gives double brilliance

to the stars. He paused to look up, taking off his hat that he might gaze unimpeded at the radiance above him. The stars had for him an immense satisfaction; not a question or a problem that their endless calm did not silence or reduce to nothingness. Orion's shining belt, Aldebaran red and glowing, the clustered Pleiades—he had his greeting for them all; he and these sleepless watchers above him sharing together and alone the secrets of the night.

But as he advanced a step or two, there were signs of human companionship, of one sharer in his vigil. Lights that were of the earth streamed from an upper row of uncurtained windows. He noticed them, well pleased. Next to the stars, he knew of no better soother or sympathizer than Mrs. Gordon. He knocked the ashes from his pipe and pocketed it, and entering a side-door left open for late comers, crossed the wide court and ran quickly up a shallow flight of steps. At the second floor he halted. His summons brought first a slow and cautious tread, then the covering of the grille was drawn sharply back, and a suspicious eye applied to the opening.

Malleson smiled at the formality.

"It is I, Miss Barbara," he said, "a person of peace."

"Eh, is it you, Mr. Malleeson?" The door was now thrown open with alacrity. "To think that I should have fallen into such spying and keeking ways, and you standing at the back of the door! It's an evil country this, for the morals."

The speaker removed her gaunt person from the doorway, and he stepped in at her invitation.

"All right, Miss Barbara," he said cheerfully; "I might have been an insinuating foreigner, with 'burgling' intentions, for all you could tell; and there are the silver plate and family jewels that I know lie heavily on your mind——"

"Indeed, Mr. Malleeson, it's me that lies on them, to tell the truth," she interrupted him, forgetting grammar in her eagerness, and speaking in an impressive whisper. "I've had it weighing on me this long while back to let you know where I kept them. You can't tell what may happen in this godless land, and it's but right that some sensible person should share the secret. As for Mrs. Gordon, poor body, I wouldn't fash her with the responsibility; but I've always held you to be a trustworthy lad."

"The soul of honour, Miss Barbara."

"Well, well, let other folks say that; it's not becoming to be boastful. Listen!" She leant forward, and laid a large and heavy hand

on his sleeve, while she spoke in an undertone with slow distinctness. "It's all sewed up among the feathers of the bed I brought from Scotland with me. You won't find the like of it in Spain."

"No; a little knobby, isn't it? I've heard of a crumpled roseleaf causing a man a wakeful night—but tea-kettles and dish-covers!"

"I gathered every one of the feathers with my own hand," she said, paying no heed to his light interruption, "and nothing but a breast one among them. There's the big tray that's been in the Gordon family for generations, and the dozen solid spoons Mary brought with her when she married Harry (the only fortune she brought him, poor lad, but I'm bound to admit they're good of their kind), and the colonel's Indian teapot, sugar-basin and cream-ewer, not to speak of the cups Harry won when he was a lad at college."

"Miss Barbara," he said, with mock horror, while she paused to remember the next item on her list, "you are a martyr to the family heir-looms!"

"You would spread it all out on the side-board, I suppose," she retorted grimly; "and as good as invite the first Spaniard that came in to put the spoons in his pocket. If that's your way of thinking, I'm sorry I spoke."

"You may trust me. I'll know where to find the spoil when you have given up your life in its defence."

"Who spoke of lives?" she said crossly. "I don't hold with that light way of speaking. I thought you were a lad of sense."

"But indeed I am," he assured her with fine gravity. "I'll keep it a profound secret, Miss Barbara. Wild horses won't drag it from me. And now, may I go in? It is not too late?"

"Oh yes, go in," she said, offended by his light acceptance of the trust reposed in him. "I wish it was too late; this turning of night into day is against Scripture and common-sense, too. But Mary was always fond of her own way."

Miss Barbara flung open a door at the end of the passage, and stood aside to let him enter, but she did not follow him. Her reined-in displeasure would not allow her to give any countenance to the young man who was a privileged visitor, and chose to come at the most unreasonable hours.

His eyes were almost blinded by the glare of light after the semi-darkness of the lobby. The room he entered was large and scantily furnished; the walls and ceilings were gaily frescoed; the floor was of wood inlaid in a close pattern; the furniture was excellent in design and upholstery,

but necessity, not luxury, had been the guiding principle in its choice.

"We have too many imaginary needs," Mrs. Gordon was used to say. "My only imperative wants are light and space; the cushioned downiness of your English boudoirs would choke me."

She lay now on a crimson sofa, in the centre of the many soft-burning lamps disposed about the room—a little fragile, white-faced woman, who suffered a great deal and said nothing about it.

She held out her hand with a smile. She had a singularly pleasant smile.

"What new weakness of mine has Barbara been revealing?" she asked.

"Only your inability to take care of your own property. She has been making me co-trustee. I consented amiably, since she didn't insist on my secreting any of the plate in my——" He stopped with a face of dismay. "I was almost letting out the hiding place!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not a bit the wiser," she laughed. "Poor Barbara! she thinks more of that old silver than of anything else in the world. I am not trusted because I'm not a true Gordon, only an interloper by marriage, so I am just allowed a peep now and then at my Harry's race cups that we were both so proud of in the old days at home."

"Let us talk of something else," he said; "the subject is full of danger, and my reputation for sense is at stake."

"Tell me about yourself, then. Do you know it is a whole week since you were here last? How is the work getting on?"

He laughed with amusement at her serious face.

"I don't write it with a big W; that would be to write myself an ass."

"You don't magnify your office. I must set you to read 'The Hero as Man of Letters' to me."

"That I may feel still further snubbed and sat upon? It's bad enough to have to supply a given quantity of 'spoon-meat for a public in a rudimentary state of intelligence' without being further depressed by disagreeable comparisons. I'll have none of your 'Hero.'"

"Think of the lives you help to influence," she said.

It was on an old ground of contention between them, and she was apt to take a sentimental and an exalted view of his calling.

Mr. Malleeson smiled sardonically.

"I'm too old to be mov'd by that flattering unction," he said. "Say all that to Felix, he'll believe you. I'll stake Miss Barbara's best teapot he has provided himself with the biggest

diary London can produce, and firmly believes he is going to write the book of the season."

"Who is Felix? and what do you mean, sir, by disposing in that frivolous way of the family plate?"

"Felix? Oh, Chester, my young cousin," he said absently. "The boy has always some new fad he swears by."

He had been walking with long steps about the room, after a fashion of his when he was restless, but now he came and sat down near her sofa, first removing one of the many lamps to a little distance.

"Take them all but one," she said, noticing the action. "Barbara will be only too glad to check my extravagance. I am thoughtless to others in my love of light."

"No, that will do. Now you can't read my face too closely while I question you."

"Begin. I am ready to tell the whole truth."

"I know it," he said; but still he did not begin. "I have just left Di," he said, after a little pause.

"She ran in yesterday to tell me the great news."

"Then she has spared me a long growl. You know Mrs. Henshaw, and you must instinctively understand my feelings——"

"Not so fast; I have not seen her for years,



remember. Not since we were both young, before her marriage and mine. People change as they grow older."

"The child was mother of the woman in her case, or I'm much mistaken. You didn't know her husband?"

He asked the question carelessly. There were many things he wanted to know, but this was not particularly one of them.

"I have just seen him—I never knew him. He was an elderly man, and reputed to be very rich, but that turned out to be a mistake, I believe, or else he lost his means, for I heard that at his death the widow and her child were but indifferently provided for."

"And yet they find money enough to travel. They have been all over Europe. That costs something. I wonder why they are coming here."

"Perhaps because they have been everywhere else," she answered, as Di had already answered. "Some people take a pride in leaving nothing undone."

"Mrs. Henshaw is not a person of that kind. She wouldn't take all the worry of a long and troublesome journey just to complete her list of European capitals. That may be part of the inducement, of course. That, and the being able to speak of the feat afterwards; but, depend

upon it, there is some stronger motive in the background."

"What makes you think that?" she asked gravely.

"My profound knowledge of human nature," he answered with a smile. "Psychological analysis, as ponderous reviewers say, is my *métier*. The apparent inducements are not sufficient—*ergo*, some secret spring is at work."

"Well, there's your cousin—isn't he inducement enough? Don't call me a malicious and match-making old woman, but I suppose I'm right in thinking the world would consider him a prize. He is rich, isn't he?"

"He has a capital income. He had a long minority. He must have five or six thousand a year."

"And Philippa Henshaw has no fortune except her beauty. But I hear that she is very attractive; and I think I have heard, too, that your cousin——"

"I'm afraid that will hardly do. Felix has been dancing attendance on Miss Henshaw for the last season or two. He makes no secret of his feelings. I did my best to check his ardour—with the usual success."

"But if she is nice!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, clasping her thin hands.

"Ah, if she is nice!" he answered in an in-

describable tone. "You think young Felix is coming to see me?"

"Why not?" It seemed to her but a proper respect on the young man's part.

"And that they are following to keep the prize in sight?" he laughed, with a touch of amusement. "It is all the other way. Felix isn't pining to see me. He never dreamt of coming till Mrs. Henshaw gently hinted her intention of honouring Madrid with her presence. Then he packed his portmanteau fast enough. Now, what I want to know is—why is she coming here?"

"My dear Ralph, I never knew you to be so curious, and—so suspicious before."

"This touches very closely on my comfort, you see. Nothing like that for making a man keen-sighted."

He rose and took a turn or two up and down the long room, then he said abruptly:

"I can't help harbouring a suspicion that Ouvry has something to do with it. He's a wonderfully mysterious old gentleman. There are unexplored depths and cavities beneath that placid exterior, depend on it."

If he expected her to follow up his lead, to join him in his conjectures or to throw light on his perplexity, he was disappointed. She said nothing at all.

"They knew each other long ago?" he questioned.

"Yes," she answered, almost reluctantly. "They were intimate once. Mr. Ouvry was closely associated with Mrs. Henshaw's father in business—as a younger partner, or confidential clerk."

"And this friendship did not last?"

"There was some coldness or disagreement, I believe."

"Don't tell me anything more," he said, pausing in his walk to look down on her with a smile. "You are right, as usual. It is no affair of mine. If he has any secrets, I hope I am not mean enough to seek to fathom them while I call him my friend. He is Di's father; one would pardon him an immense amount of misdeeds on that score alone. It is his chief virtue that he is Di's father."

"But I don't know of anything that you and I are called on to forgive," she said earnestly. "His life has been open to us all for a long time; as for anything that may have gone before—he has as much right to keep silence about his past as the others of us."

"As I claim to have, you mean, and perhaps with as good a cause. By Jove!" he broke out suddenly, "what a queer set we are, we English here! Ishmaelites and outcasts, most

of us; not one of us, I suppose, that has not somehow or other made a mess of his life."

"Not you," she said quickly, with a certain pride.

"Not I?" I should have thought I was the most conspicuous failure of them all."

"You must not class yourself with these others. Do you remember that time, long ago, when you came to me—you were a boy, then, hardly older than Di is now—and I made you tell me everything?"

"I remember," he said shortly. Then more lightly, "I was a weakling in those days, and thought nobody had a better ground of quarrel with the world than I. I've often wondered since at your patience with my ravings."

"Hush, hush," she said gently. "The only thing I have ever regretted—and I have grieved over it constantly since—is that I did not insist on writing to your grandfather."

"It would have been a mere waste of time and trouble," he said, tossing back his hair. "My grandfather had an undue share of the family temper, which isn't sweet at the best, and I'm afraid he would have given you a specimen of it. The Mallesons are a 'dour' race, as you say in the north, and they pride themselves on never changing. The old man has been true to the family tradition, for he has died without abating an inch of his claim."

"If you had only understood each other better!" she sighed.

"Understood each other!" he repeated; "there was no difficulty about that. He wanted me to bind myself to him body and soul, and to fling over poor Rod, and all for some paltry consideration of shillings and pence. That was to be my *reward*, forsooth! Well, I declined, and that was the best day's work I ever did. He has left his money to a big London charity; as for the title, which, unfortunately, he couldn't will away, poor old Rod has provided for it, in a most satisfactory manner, and now you want to make out that I'm eaten up with vexation and disappointment!"

She smiled at his tragic tone, but she said wistfully, "You ought to have had the best."

"And so I have," he retorted quickly. "I wouldn't change if I could do it by holding up one of my fingers. It was a blessed day for me when I shook myself free from the hateful conventionalities and caste prejudices of my native land. Here it is at least possible to live for yourself, and not for your neighbour; to act up to your convictions, and not according to the *rôle* society thrusts upon you. And now," he added, ruefully, "after all these years of peaceful obscurity, we are to be dragged out again, and made to play our parts on that hateful stage."

"Mrs. Henshaw isn't 'society,'" said Mrs. Gordon, interrupting this tirade with a smiling remonstrance.

"You think not? Wait till you see," he said, ominously. "Perhaps when Di is transformed into a young lady of the period, under the rule of a step-mother——"

"A stepmother! Oh, that could never be—never. I have good reasons for saying so. If you like"—she hesitated—"I will tell you what little I know about Mr. Ouvry, if there is any good end to be served."

"No, there could be no possible good in my knowing anything he chooses to keep to himself, unless it were to shield Di from trouble."

"I think you need not fear that, at least, for her. Mrs. Henshaw means well, I believe, and this proposed visit, I should imagine, is meant as a sign of restored friendliness—a flag of truce—an olive branch—whatever you like to call it."

"I should prefer the lady's coldness," he said, with a shrug.

"But we must think of Di."

"It is Di I am chiefly thinking of."

"It is something at least that heart-burnings and disagreements should not descend to her. Old quarrels are not a good legacy; the child must start clear of them."

"Still, with all your charity—and you have a

most inconvenient amount for a man who wants to have his growl—you can't call Mrs. Henshaw's company elevating or inspiring. Deonys had better never see anything of society at all than have her first glimpse of it through such a medium."

Mrs. Gordon turned so that she could face him. He had seated himself again near her sofa.

"We can't make the world anew for our little girl," she said gently, "or cushion it that she may not find out the hard places, after the fashion of a lady I knew who bandaged the legs of her tables and chairs in case her child should stumble against them. Di must take people as she finds them. If she makes some mistakes at first, she will choose the right friendships in the end."

"So be it, then. We must submit to the inevitable. You make a man good-natured against his will. I release you from the witness-box."

"And I think you ought to take my place there. It is my turn to become questioner. This Miss Henshaw—what sort of a girl is she? She is pretty?"

"Very pretty; quite unusually so. One of those blue-eyed, pink and white complexioned beauties you never see out of England."

"How old is she?"



"Older than Di. About twenty-one, I should think; perhaps rather more."

"And clever?"

"Clever enough," he answered, with an odd smile. "She is good-natured, too, up to a certain point. There is every chance that you will like her."

"You speak as if that would be a misfortune!"

"She begins by fascinating most people. Whether the glamour lasts, that is another matter," he said, half to himself.

Mrs. Gordon was not listening. She summed up the items rapidly; they made a fair show. Taken as a whole, the picture was not unpleasant. There must be some solid foundation for such universal liking.

"She will make a nice companion for Di," she said cheerfully. "It is just what the child needs. You and I are too old and too grave for her, Ralph; we need not make an old woman of her before the time. You must bring Miss Henshaw to see me."

"Oh, certainly; and Mrs. Henshaw too?"

"That must be as she pleases," she answered, with a faint flush. "She may not care to renew the acquaintance."

"That means that you will not take any special pains to encourage her?"

"No, it means just what I said; but a young girl won't grudge half an hour to an old sick woman.

"Don't call yourself names, please. Miss Philippa will come without any encouragement at all, and you will pronounce her charming. Di will swear an eternal friendship for her; and Miss Barbara will think her almost good enough for a Gordon."

"And you?"

"And I? Ah, you forget, there are certain maladies one can't take twice. And now, good-bye. Miss Barbara is nursing her wrath, I know; let me escape before she visits it on my head."

"Come back soon," she called, as he reached the door.

He paused to look back with a smile.

"If she is unendurably tiresome I will reserve the right of coming to you for consolation," he said, and then he shut the door with commendable softness, remembering Miss Barbara.

After all, he carried away an impression she had not intended to leave on his mind.

"It is some old folly of a love entanglement," he said to himself, as he walked quickly through the now almost deserted streets. "Mrs. Henshaw is a lady of large imagination." His lips curled in half-contemptuous amusement. "One can hardly fancy Ouvry the object of a tender

passion; but these things are all a mystery. There's no accounting for a woman's fancies, or a man's either, for that matter. So long as this piece of middle-aged sentimentality—this holding out of the olive branch—does not affect Di, or disturb the child's peace, what does one need to care?"

So he went his way, a little more graciously disposed towards the universe in general, after the fashion of a man who has relieved his mind by airing his grievances. He dismissed the newcomers from his thoughts as he hung up his hat and sat down at his table laden with papers and writing materials; for, in spite of his slighting reference to it, he loved his work as he loved few things in life.

Mrs. Gordon, not yet delivered over to Miss Barbara's tender mercies, was holding audience of another kind in her large, brightly lit room.

"Have I done rightly, Harry?" she was saying to herself, murmuring half aloud in the absent way one quickly falls into who lives much alone, her large eyes—the only feature in her wasted face sickness had left beautiful—fixed and dreamy. "Have I done what you, with your larger knowledge, would counsel as the best to do? He loves the child, you see, though he hardly knows it himself, and he would have been hurt and angry for her sake. And you

would have me shield her from pain, wouldn't you, as you would have shielded our little girl, who is with you now?" Her thoughts had left Deonys, had travelled far afield, following wistfully the dead husband and child, so long unseen, and yet, as it seemed, always near.

Miss Barbara, coming in with rough brusqueness, was arrested by the solemn tenderness of the pale, patient face—that look that the mothers of lost children sometimes wear. She knew it well, and it touched some soft place in her honest heart, but she always considered it her duty to discountenance by every means in her power any sorrowful dwelling on the past.

"Come, come," she said, with authority in her voice, "it's not a time of night to begin thinking of them that are away. Just listen to yon old fool of a watchman screeching out twelve o'clock, disturbing honest folks in their first sleep."

"Don't scold me, Barbara"—Mrs. Gordon looked up into the hard, rough face with a smile—"for I've really been behaving beautifully."

"Scold you! I know better what's due to a Gordon, I hope, though you were born a MacGregor. It would be more to the purpose if I was to scold Mr. Malleeson, keeping you up to this hour of night with his havers. I doubt

he's not just the douce, sober lad I took him to be. There was a lightness about him when I spoke of the plate that sits ill on a young man when you are giving a secret to his keeping. I don't hold with that easy way of passing everything off with a laugh and a joke. You would have thought it was common electro plate that you can buy in any Birmingham shop, to hear him talk."

"But, indeed, he was quite aware of the honour you were doing him in trusting him," said Mrs. Gordon, eager to reassure the angry spinster. "He told me about it."

"He never told you where it's hidden!" cried Miss Barbara, ready forthwith to give up the last shred of her confidence in man.

"No, not he." Mrs. Gordon repressed her inclination to smile with admirable success. "He did not betray the secret. I am just as ignorant of the hiding place as he was till to-night. No burglar will wrest the secret out of me. You have taken the best means to prevent that."

"Well, you haven't the courage of a Gordon, not that I'm blaming you for what is not your fault; we are all as we are made," she said, with lofty pity; "but I never was one to put temptation in the way of the weak. And maybe I wronged the lad," she added, with the air of

making a great concession; "but why couldn't he speak like a sensible man, instead of laughing like any bairn?"

"He will act like a man when the time comes. And, do you know," she went on, by way of changing the subject, "he is going to bring a beautiful and charming young lady—a sort of princess out of a fairy tale—to see us. He prophesies we shall both fall in love with her before we know what we are about."

Miss Barbara received this piece of news with depressing gloom.

"I wish I had held my silly, chattering tongue," she said, as she brushed her sister's hair. Miss Barbara took a secret pride, to which she would not have owned, in the long thick tresses now widely streaked with grey, that her young brother Harry had thought the most beautiful in the world. But to-night she had no heart in her work, and passed the brush listlessly up and down.

"If it's love nonsense he's got in his head," she said grimly, "it's little he'll care to help two old women like you and me. I'm sorely disappointed in that lad."

There rose before Mrs. Gordon a vivid mental vision of the man from whom she had just parted—a man worn and old before his time—and she smiled a little sadly at the misapplied

epithet. To Miss Barbara, gaunt, grim, and sixty, what was he but a boy, with a spirit of unpardonable levity and an incapacity for sense?

"There's Deonys," she went on presently, "in spite of her outlandish name, as good and as bonnie a girl as you'll find out of Scotland."

"Almost good enough for a Gordon," said the other mischievously.

But this was to Miss Barbara as the red rag to the bull.

"A Gordon, indeed! Set her up to look so high! It's not every one that's fit to mate with the old race, as you very well know yourself. Eh, but what am I saying!" She broke off suddenly. "And there's never a man among them left to choose wife or rear sons and daughters to carry on the old name; never a Gordon of the real old stock but you and me—two lone women in a foreign land."

An unmistakable tear fell plump on the long hair, which was now being twisted into a knot; but the next instant Miss Barbara was scolding vigorously.

"Come now, Mary, I never said you were to cry about it." (Mrs. Gordon's eyes were dry.) "I won't have you falling off your sleep at this time of night; it's not for us to be moaning and lamenting like other silly folks. You get into bed, and I'll read to ye. It's very comfort-

ing to the mind to be read out to, and you'll just not heed the sense, but go to sleep."

Mrs. Gordon submitted with gratitude for the kindness of the proposal, but not without a secret doubt as to the certainty of its soothing powers. Miss Barbara's reading was very different from her speech, which was homely, and with frequent lapses into her native Doric. Reading aloud was an accomplishment on which she prided herself. It had a flavour of the parish school about it that was arresting, but hardly tranquilizing. She delivered the matter in a high-pitched sing-song, giving due emphasis to all the large words and raising her voice at the end of every sentence, without paying any slavish attention to punctuation.

Mrs. Gordon shut her eyes, as she had been peremptorily commanded to do, and tried to think only of the familiar words and not of the medium through which they reached her. She feigned sleep so that Miss Barbara might retire complacently elated by the success of her plan; but long after the heavy breathing coming from the next room told of her companion's repose, her mind was actively awake, travelling now far back into the vanished past, now into the near future, sparing a tender thought, too, for the young girl who was almost like a second daughter, almost like the dear, dead child given



back in some inexplicable fashion to the mother's hungry love.

What vigorous anger would not Miss Barbara have shown, had she known through how many weary hours the vigil was kept. The French window was wide open (in defiance of burglars). There was at last a cool, refreshing wind; there were stars looking down out of the blue. And into the silence came once and again the watchman's hoarse cry, recording the slow hours, telling of the peace and serenity that wrapped about the sleeping world. It seemed—foolish thought though it was—to this one wakeful dreamer, a prophetic forecast of the sheltered, love-lit life that lay before Deonys, the little girl for whom so many hearts beat with a kindly solicitude.

## CHAPTER III.

“Harsh discords and displeasing sharps.”

DEONYS was up betimes next morning and out almost before the streets were awake. She had her bodyguard with her—Concha, the faithful and grim old serving-woman, and a little maiden who was to act as her deputy while she told her beads in the Carmen, to guard the señorita from the too prying scrutiny of the students loitering to the university, or of the soldiers marching with brisk importance to the parade ground. They were each provided with a basket. Concha carried that which was to contain the supply of food for family consumption; Deonys had one of a lighter make on her arm and appeared anxious to conceal it from the sharp eyes of her attendant. Never before had the marketing seemed so prolonged a business, never the choice of sardines, legs and wings of chickens, the kid for roasting, so weighty a matter. She stood by in impatient

patience while the haggling and bargaining was conducted, the silver *pesetas* and the copper *cuartos* slowly counted out, and the small coin of compliments and greetings exchanged. It is always a long affair that traffic in pretty speeches; and you do not know the Spaniard if you imagine he will bestir himself because you are in haste.

Concha's basket was at last laden, crisp lettuces and vivid tomatoes at the top of all. In this land everything makes itself into a picture. The large, light market was now full of chattering groups, and the business of the day, which, here as elsewhere, consists too often in over-reaching your neighbour if you can, had fairly begun. Di knew the little comedy by heart: the voices raised in eager persuasion, hands in tragic despair as the fate of a single *cuarto* hangs in the balance, the quick surrender, the smiling, yet dignified indifference. She had watched it all a thousand times through every act with a keener sense of amusement than she could summon on this occasion, for to-day she was quickly weary of it all, and could hardly conceal her anxiety to see Concha absorbed in her devotions.

At last they left the market, crossed a breadth of street already flooded with early sunshine, quickly lost to them in the gloom of a large,

bare church. When their eyes grew used to the dimness they saw that one or two of the market folk were before them: women, broad-shouldered and large-limbed, with bright handkerchiefs framing brown faces, kneeling beside their empty baskets; thanking the Madonna for an excellent sale and her gracious aid in victorious chaffering, yet not too absorbed in the patter of *aves* to have an eye to any chance opportunity that the lifting of the dingy curtain might bring; bargaining with one breath for a portion in heaven, but not uncareful, like a certain steward of old, of the mammon of unrighteousness; for the season of strangers had arrived, and any moment might produce a foreign milord or milady, on whom a little importunity would be well bestowed.

The particular shrine in which Concha had invested the "capital of her supplications" was as yet vacant, and she went towards it with a greedy stride, hardly waiting to admonish her companions to return home quickly.

Deonys was free. She laid a hand on her small escort, and led her away, nothing loth, behind the ragged screen and out once more into the kindly sunlight.

"See, Pepita," she said, opening her hand and showing a small heap of coins, "I have

all this to spend yet; and you must come back with me to the flower market. Quick, for we must be home before Concha."

Pepita, awed by the audacity of the scheme, trotted silently beside her young mistress, and opened her black eyes to their widest at the reckless purchases that were now made. Di had no time for bargaining, but she was hard to please. The great juicy water-pears and melons, the bunches of green and purple grapes must be perfect of their kind; and nothing would serve her but the rarest and costliest flowers brought all the way from Seville—heliotropes, late roses, carnations, and everything that was sweet and pleasant to look upon.

The store of silver was all spent and the baskets laden, nothing was left except an *ochavito* or two for the beggars, when they left the market for the second time. Di usually extended her walk to the palace. In the formal gardens near it, some little fair-haired English children were always to be seen at this hour. They were friends of hers, but to-day she had no superfluous leisure to spare. She was walking quickly, choosing the quietest and nearest streets, when she almost ran against some one coming the other way, coming deliberately and lazily, as if nothing in the world were worth hasting for—not even the chance

of meeting this bright, young girl, who was English, too.

"Don't knock me down, please, Di," said Malleeson, in a meek voice.

"What! You?" She paused, and looked up astonished. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Ralph; but surely something wonderful must have happened that one should meet you at this hour."

"Give me that basket. You people who pride yourselves on any particular virtue are always anxious to keep the whole merit and glory to yourselves. Why should I be looked on as having done something so very extraordinary, when for once I choose to make myself uncomfortable?"

"But it is extraordinary," she persisted, though she smiled, "because, you know, you are dreadfully lazy."

"I don't know it."

"Oh, I wouldn't deny it, if I were you. You confessed to it this moment, when you said it made you uncomfortable to be out at this hour. Have they come?" she demanded eagerly, as a new possibility struck her. Of course they had arrived, and he was on his way to meet them.

"If they had come you wouldn't have had the pleasure of my company," he answered, with much fervour.

"You wouldn't have had any time to spare for me, I suppose," she said, lifting up her chin. "Well, I don't understand it. And the father, too, he was dressing when I left the house; and that is why I am in such a hurry to get home. I think you are both going to turn over a new leaf."

Malleson made a private note of this bit of information. That Mr. Ouvry should voluntarily rise at six o'clock in the morning was extraordinary, if you like, and was, one might say, a remarkable exhibition of the strength of an old attachment; but aloud he replied, in that aggrieved voice of his—

"I told you so. Here are we all practising our company manners, even before the company arrives. There is one comforting thought, one may always be asleep when the train comes in. Virtue deserves a reward."

"Not at all," said Di, with delightful imperiousness. "Don't suppose anything of the kind. You are going to the station, you and the padre, both of you, and you are coming home to breakfast with us now, so that you may not escape."

"My inner man yields a willing consent to the last part of the scheme. As for the rest——"

"As for the rest, you will go when the time comes," she said, nodding at him. "Besides, I

want you to do ever so many things for me. Concha got the keys of the rooms last night; and Pepita has scrubbed all the floors. You see, we have not been quite idle; but I want you to show me the English way of hanging curtains and arranging furniture."

"Well, you shall have the benefit of my valuable advice on one condition; and I was in England last spring, so, of course, I am to be relied on for the very latest fashions. I am the final authority."

"I am Sir Oracle," she quoted saucily. "Well, your conditions?"

"That every single grape on these bunches, and every rose in all this great basket be devoted to the fair Philippa. She wears roses, I know; and I have a fancy that her liking for sweet things extends to grapes and pears."

They had reached the house now, and Di turned round rather indignantly—

"Of course," she said, "I meant them all for her and Mrs. Henshaw. Do you think we have forgotten how to be hospitable, or that we have grown so very selfish? You shall carry them to their rooms yourself; the door is open."

She led the way into an apartment on the first floor, similar in size and arrangement to that she occupied above with her father. The warm sunlight coming in at uncurtained win-



dows had dried the newly-washed floors, and the blocks of red and black marble already felt hot to the touch. Some furniture was heaped in a confused mass in the middle of the room she entered, and, as he followed her, he noticed with sudden disapproval one or two of her own more treasured possessions among it. He set down the basket on the middle of the table, and looked slowly about him.

"Yes, we can soon adapt this room to the most conservative British taste," he said, "with a little alteration here and there."

"Tell me what to get," she said, leaning her elbows on the table, and looking at him seriously. "If there is anything wanted that we have, I'll get it in a minute."

"Oh no, I should rather say there were some superfluous things. That little easy chair, for instance, will hardly suit Mrs. Henshaw's ample proportions; and as for Miss Henshaw, I know her ideal in seats. I have one in my mind at this moment that will suit her exactly. I can order it to be sent as I go home. Suppose I carry this one upstairs again?"

"It's my own little chair. The most comfortable we have," she explained.

"Well, if I carry it up it will help to dispose of this chaos, wont it?"

He laid hands as he spoke on a little low

armchair, which Di usually occupied. He had seen her seated in it often by the window. He remembered the occasion of its being presented long ago, on one of her birthdays; he had suggested the gift, though her father had bought it. It had a dark blue cover, against which he had often thought her cream white tints were well relieved; he did not choose that Philippa Henshaw's complexion should have the same advantage.

"Very well," she said, reluctantly, looking rather disappointed. I asked Concha to carry it down because I thought the room looked so bare and empty with only this ugly sofa and these stiff, gilded chairs."

"Mrs. Henshaw would refuse to occupy any room that had not gilded chairs," he answered, gravely. "You appealed to my superior knowledge, remember. I must decline the responsibility if you leave those footstools about, Di, and this embroidery; we mustn't risk having our taste called in question. You have no bright flowers in crewels, have you, or a group of Isaac and Rebecca at the well, or the Dresden Madonna in Berlin wool-work? Not even a parrot or a cat in beads?"

"You know I haven't," she answered, perplexed and crest-fallen. "You know every one of my things, you gave them to me yourself,

almost all of them. I thought they would make the room look better, and not as formal as if it were set out for a *tertulia*, and now you are taking away every one of the things I brought down with me. I chose out the very prettiest and best. I can't understand it."

"Ah, but we are in a puerile state of culture, here in the south. When I was in England, I had my eyes opened to many things. We must follow what dim lights are granted to us, and avoid the risk of being disgraced."

"A parrot in bead-work would be hideous, I think," she answered, following him reluctantly, as he shouldered the chair, and stooped to pick up the footstools.

"Your saurians of an unknown period would be voted still more hideous, I'm afraid," he said, glancing with a smile at the strange monsters unclassified by any geologist, that were worked in curious device on the draperies she carried.

"Well, I shall always think my embroidery beautiful, whatever any one may say," she answered, stroking the old faded gold and harmoniously blended colours of the quaint designs. My beasts are better than your cats and parrots, at any rate. And there are always the flowers," she added, brightening again as her eye fell on the baskets in the middle of the table. "Every one must love flowers."

"I don't know," he answered, with grave doubt in his voice. "It is some months since I had that glimmer of light, and culture grows at a tremendous pace, as you will soon find out. Still, I think we may venture on the flowers."

"Oh, now, you are laughing," she exclaimed. "Have you been making fun of me all this time?"

But whether he had been laughing at her or not, it was soon evident that Maileson was not content till he had removed everything that belonged by right to Di (it need hardly be told that Mr. Ouvry had not been called on to contribute anything), and had restored it to its accustomed place. The low chair was again wheeled to the window, the curtain draped in the right folds behind it, the stool placed ready for the little feet to rest on, the rugs and embroideries, the knickknacks, and *bric-à-brac* all replaced in their old positions.

While he was thus occupied, Di had disappeared behind the tapestry that divided her little alcove from the larger room. She came back in a moment without her hat, her cheeks rosy, and her eyes bright with pleasure. At the same moment Mr. Ouvry entered by another door. She went up to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"What a good, kind padre to give me such a

nice surprise," she said; "and was it for that you got up so early; and how did you get to the market without my seeing you? It was very clever of you, you dear old father."

"My dear child, I really don't know," Mr. Ouvry began, blandly accepting the caress—"I really don't know what you are talking about."

"Why, the basket of flowers and fruit!" she said. "Didn't you send them in?"

"I can't take any undeserved merit in the matter." He shook his head. "I saw them in your room, and I thought you had bought them in anticipation of our—a—guests' arrival; and a very pretty little attention it is."

"Then I know who did it, and why some body got up so early."

She went up to Malleson, who was busy adjusting a picture to his liking.

"I thank you very much," she said; "but indeed I meant every one of those others for her. I should not have kept any for myself."

"When there are two young ladies under one roof," said Malleson, carefully examining the set of the picture with his head on one side, "I always consider it a good plan to make them exactly equal; and as you were not likely to make yourself a present, I had to see that you were not left out. Is that picture quite even, do

you think? My eye seems to tell me it inclines a trifle to the right."

"I don't know—yes, it is quite straight," she said hastily. Then she added in a low voice, "I shouldn't have been jealous, and I do wish she had had the best. Yours are far finer than mine, both the flowers and the fruit, and I know, of course, you must care for her the most——"

Mr. Ouvry, who was manipulating a cigarette, smiled covertly at this little speech.

"Oh, of course," said Malleon, with great gravity, "that is why I am taking such immense pains to please her. Will you give me some breakfast, Di, and then I can go and get that chair I spoke of."

Breakfast was rather a solemn meal; there was little talk. Di sipped her coffee but she only played with the food on her plate. Malleon alone exhibited an excellent appetite, and helped himself liberally to fried sardines and omelet. Mr. Ouvry was at no time a breakfast-eater, and the earliness of the hour deprived him of what small inclination he possessed; his every attitude was a protest against the folly of early rising. His pale eyes wandered restlessly about the room.

"So you have brought back the chairs and tables you meant to appropriate to our friends?"

he said, bringing his glances back to his daughter's face.

"Yes, father, because——"

"Yes, yes," he said, airily setting aside her explanations with one hand, "I quite understand; and I agree with you. As a matter of delicate feeling, we must not put our friends under a sense of obligation; we must do as we would be done by. A feeling of tact is a very womanly quality; it pleases me that you encourage it."

"But it was not my doing," said Di, flushing and a little vexed. "Ralph says people are not used to such things in England. You know you did, Ralph, and that they would think them old fashioned or in bad taste."

"My tastes may be old fashioned, I admit," said Mr. Ouvry, with mild patience; "but bad?"

"Only from the lady's point of view," Malleson struck in hastily.

"I am willing to own there may be a difference of opinion."

"But of course our opinion is the right one," said Malleson, smiling at Deonys. "Why should you despoil your rooms—a picture is a greater loss than a friend; we can supply the element of prettiness at a lesser cost than that. If you will allow me, I'll send in one or

two things to trim up the room a little. Women like those small attentions, and I think I can hit Mrs. Henshaw's fancy in the matter of ornaments."

"Certainly, certainly, a very good plan. I have the highest esteem for the ladies, and every desire to make them comfortable," said Mr. Ouvry, crossing one leg and folding his hands. "It's just what I should have proposed myself; it's a more delicate way, you understand."

"I know a very decent fellow who will supply the articles reasonably," said Ralph, who understood very well indeed.

"Then I leave it to you." He dismissed the subject gracefully. "But, my dear boy, it's my affair, you know; you will oblige me by instructing the person you speak of to send in his bill to me."

"As you like," Malleeson answered, rising and pushing back his chair; "and when I come back, Di, we shall convert the sala into an English boudoir."

Was there ever a drearier farce, he thought to himself as he crossed the hot Puerta del Sol. He had promised himself an amusing comedy, and already, before one of the actors had arrived, he was growing weary of it all. He had undertaken to order quarters for his cousin at the



Hôtel de Paris. That was quickly done. Chester had a fair appetite for luxury and a long purse to satisfy it. The front suite of rooms on the first floor with the velvet furniture and gilded clocks and the teeming life of the square, as seen from the windows, would abundantly meet his desires. The selecting of the furniture that was to supply the picturesque element in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room was a matter that required more pondering. He had at one time made a study of Philippa Henshaw's fancies, and it amused him for the moment to gratify them.

The account, which he duly ordered to be made in Mr. Ouvry's name, was a very trifling one representing tastes of the most modest order; it did not include the pink wax candles, straight-backed chair (Philippa always sat on a low chair with an upright back), or little table with a sloping desk for a novel, and drooping bag of silk to hold a bit of work. Why did he buy those things? He could hardly himself have answered that question. Not out of love for Philippa who would use them. That fire—never of the most ardent—had died out long ago, but from its ashes there had sprung a half-tolerant, half-kindly liking, less easily quenched, that rendered the bestowing of gifts on her in its way a pleasure. He was besides instinctively

generous; and behind and beneath all these reasons was the consciousness of making Di happy, and to make Di happy was to do a good day's work.

Left alone, Deonys did not at once bestir herself to her task of arranging the rooms. It had somehow lost its zest. She sat still at her place at table, thinking a little wistfully how well Ralph knew just what Miss Henshaw would like best; and what a pity, what a sad fatality it would be if, in the meantime, she had given her affection to this other young man who was coming with her, and who had naturally many more opportunities of making himself pleasant to her. For by this time Di, woman-like, had made up her mind that, despite his philosophy, Ralph Malleson had not escaped the universal destiny. Invested with this new character of lover and moreover, of unsuccessful lover, he took a new and pensive interest in her eyes. Her pity of him was abruptly silenced by her father's voice.

"Di," he said, beginning to pace the room, "I should like you to be very attentive to our friends."

"Of course, padra." She looked up rather surprised.

Mr. Ouvry, usually the personification of graceful repose, looked an awkward enough

figure threading the narrow space between the crowded furniture.

"You can't think how nice it will be for me to have some one of my own age to talk to," she said, seeing he did not speak. "I've never had a girl friend before; that is, if Miss Henshaw cares to be my friend, of course."

"It is hardly my fault that you have been so friendless."

"I never dreamt of blaming you, father," she said, with tender reproach in her voice, "it is nobody's fault. One can't make English people live here against their will. I only meant to show you that even for my own sake I must be good to her."

"I've no doubt you'll find all the pleasure you anticipate in her society. I'm told she's a very charming young lady indeed. Still, my child, youthful friendships are proverbially rash, and it is as well to be cautious—not to go too fast, you know."

"But I thought you liked Mrs. Henshaw so much," said Di, innocently. This antique piece of advice, which sounded like a maxim extracted from some musty book, was disturbing to her. "I thought you knew her when you were young. It is not as if they were strangers."

"There was an intimacy between the families

at one time undoubtedly, but you forget the lapse of years."

One would have said there was a shade of irritation in his voice, if so bland a gentleman could be irritated.

"Mrs. Henshaw, if I remember her character, will prefer to renew the acquaintance without much reference to the past. There have been changes and troubles in both our lives, and a delicate and sensitive mind shrinks from recalling its sufferings."

"But I couldn't talk to her about the past, even if I wished," said Di, looking at him with honest perplexity and desire to understand. "I don't know anything about her life, or yours when you knew her," she added softly.

"No, no; why should you know?" he said hastily. "Sad memories are for those of us who are old; but you, my child, you have the future all before you."

"But you are happy too, padre?"

"Happy? Yes, yes, I have many satisfactions. I have known trouble, but one does not suffer always."

"I would have shared the trouble too, if you had let me," she said wistfully. "One doesn't want to be thought only fit to live in the sunshine."

"Your own troubles will begin soon enough,"

he said, with again a touch of sharpness. "If I have spared you mine, it has been from wise motives, which you will perhaps understand one day."

She did not speak for a moment, and then she said—

"I haven't vexed you with any questions, have I, papa?"

"No; you have been a good child—a good daughter," he said, with some real tenderness.

"Of course there are things I have wanted to know—about mamma, for instance; every girl must want to know about her mother, but I have tried not to be troublesome. But I will ask one thing now. Did Mrs. Henshaw know mamma?"

"She knew your poor mother," he answered, softly. "I may say she knew her better than any one else."

"And you feared that she might talk to me about her?"

"Feared, Deonys?" he said, with melancholy reproach, "what should I fear but your pain? Was I wrong in crediting you with my own sensitive shrinking from the reopening of an old wound?"

"I don't mean that, father; I don't think I can explain what I meant." His words somehow grated on her, and left a feeling of unreality. "It

wouldn't be pain to me," she was thinking, and then she was suddenly ashamed. How much he must have loved her mother, since he had laid that silence of years upon himself!

"But about Mrs. Henshaw," she said. "As you have told me nothing at all about her, she will not be hurt if I keep always to everyday things, will she? Because one must talk about something."

She spoke without ironical intention, anxious only to guard against a too rough handling of the lady's very fine feelings.

"Far be it from me to fetter your speech, my child," said Mr. Ouvry, with an air of being most honourable and generous. "As for my life, it is open to you; my affairs are yours to discuss as you will. If I venture to hint that Mrs. Henshaw—excellent creature—is perhaps a trifle too frank and confiding (shall I say indiscreet), in her conversation, it was only to remark that it seems to me wisest and kindest to discourage any little confidences she may choose to make. There are times when they become embarrassing."

"I think you mean that I am not to ask any questions," she said, going straight to the point through all his beating about the bush. There was a hurt ring in her low voice that she strove for the moment vainly to control. She was

entirely honest herself, and she did not understand the necessity for diplomacy.

"I only spoke of my own intentions," he put in mildly. "I don't control you; do as you like. You will find it a little tiresome, perhaps," he smiled pleasantly, "but I have warned you."

"Then I will take your words, as if they were meant for me. I shouldn't have been curious, I think. No, papa, you might have trusted me. Do you think because we are so happy now that I have not guessed you suffered once? Do you think I have forgotten that mamma is dead?"

She said the last words almost in a whisper, as if she shrank from touching an old sore. Was it any wonder that in her innocence, with an ever urgent sense of her own loss in her mind, she should come back to the old belief that this was the sorrow he hinted at?—this the past experience he shrank from having discussed?

Mr. Ouvry, at the other end of the room, knocked down a book that lay on a little table near his elbow. It was a clumsy action and unlike him. He stooped slowly to pick it up and replace it carefully; then he turned and came to her. He stood behind her chair; she felt his hand resting on the back.

"My child," he said, "you have guessed rightly. I have had my days of suffering. I have borne them, I hope, in a proper spirit—let all that pass. I have tried to make you happy, Di, and to keep all knowledge of my troubles, my past troubles, from you; and in return it is not too much, is it, to ask for your sympathy? I refuse to believe that you willingly misunderstand me."

An appeal like this was sure to touch her, and he knew it. She had risen in a minute, and put her arms about him impulsively.

"Dearest padre," she said, "don't let us talk of sad things any more—of misunderstandings—as if we two could quarrel! I shall begin to hate these people, and to think Ralph is right, if it makes us cross and uncomfortable even to talk about them. As for Mrs. Henshaw, who cares less than I do about the foolish things she may say? Do you think I would let her say anything about you that wasn't nice? There, let me see you smile, padre." She threw back her head and looked at him bravely, though there were tears in her eyes. "And I promise to be the very discreetest, wisest and most prudent of daughters."

He would have been hard indeed who could have withstood this appealing. Mr. Ouvry was not hard; he was very fond of her in his way;



he could not, perhaps, help it that his disposition was "tepid" and his range of feeling narrow. He loved her as well, perhaps, as he knew how to love anything beyond himself. His face recovered its blandness; and his "God bless you, my child," was almost fervent. It comforted Di, though she could not quite recover the old gaiety.

Malleson found her an hour later gravely arranging the roses. He sat down on a corner of the table and watched her lazily. He knew, after the first glance at her downcast face, that something had disturbed her.

"What is it, Di?" he asked, looking at her earnestly.

"Nothing," she said quickly, not answering his look.

He watched her in silence for a minute or two, and then he got up and began to push about the chairs, as if to get rid of some superfluous energy. In five minutes the room was transformed. The man arrived with the articles he had chosen; but by this time his little spring of interest had run dry.

"Put them anywhere," he said impatiently, as the messenger paused awkwardly for orders. "Push them into any odd corner; take them back with you if you like." He turned away.

"What a pretty little table!" said Di. "Oh, put it here, please, by the window. The room looks very nice now, don't you think? It only wants some books. I wonder what kind of books Miss Henshaw likes?"

"Miss Henshaw will supply her own intellectual food," he said, almost savagely. "Her appetite is not discriminating; we need hardly trouble ourselves to cater for it. If you want to go to the station," he said, more gently, "it is time to get ready."

"I am not going," she said, lingering to put some last finishing touches to the room, "I shall wait here. Will you tell papa, please, if it is time?"

Mr. Ouvry was to be allowed to get over the first painful allusions without a witness.

She had meant to go, and he knew it; but when he would have asked the reason of this change of plan, something checked the words on his lips.

"All right," he said carelessly. "It is very hot; you are wise to stay at home."

"Yes, it is hot," she acquiesced.

(They tacitly agreed to accept the heat as a sufficient argument.)

Left alone, she paced the rooms a little restlessly, seeking a relief from her bewildered thoughts.

Involuntarily—for she was an order-loving little woman—she straightened a fold here, and picked up a mote there, while she was fighting against the first faint shadow of distrust, the instinctive dislike of a truthful nature to anything of a mystery. The consciousness that there was a vague something she must not ask about, must not even think about, weighed on her heavily. Yet she strove to be true to the letter of her promise. By-and-by she went to her own little nest behind the tapestry hanging. What tremulous prayers may not have risen there, what simple, loyal petitions for her father's safe-keeping from more sorrow, what entreaties that old wounds might be healed!

She was, for the first time, face to face with a new possibility from which she shrank—the possibility that doubt, distrust, estrangement, might creep into the life that had been as yet so open and unclouded. All the impulses of her nature went out towards more love, more tenderness. The saddest thing in the whole wide world seemed the loss or the lessening of these.

Ten minutes—a quarter of an hour later, Concha, going about her work, heard her young mistress singing. Di was hanging over the balcony, looking eagerly down on the shifting

crowd, watching for the first glimpse of the coming guests.

She had put on her white dress. A string of gold beads about her throat caught the sunlight.

## CHAPTER IV.

*Pol.* "What do you hear, my lord?"

*Ham.* "Words, words, words."

YET when they came, when she saw them descend from the cab, she felt her cheeks grow hot. A sudden shyness took possession of her; she would have liked to run away. Instead, she went downstairs without more ado, went slowly, and yet quickly enough to be there waiting for them—a sedate and slender figure standing out white in the dimness of the lower passage.

Ralph Malleson was the first to notice her. Perhaps he had been looking for her. He touched her father on the arm. Mr. Ouvry looked round sharply.

"Ah, Deonys," he said. "Yes, come forward, my child; let me introduce you to my old friend and your friend from to-day, I hope. Mrs. Henshaw, allow me to present my daughter to you."

Di felt herself overshadowed by a tall figure, which stooped and kissed her; the kiss was so careless that it alighted somewhere near her ear. The lady was swathed in a gauze travelling veil; and Di, looking up with shy eyes, could not distinguish any features.

"Odd now, wasn't it, that I should never have known till to-day that you had a daughter? I call it very singular, very singular indeed. And quite a big girl, too!"

This was said by the lady as it might seem almost in a tone of reproof.

"Di has done growing," said Malleson gravely. "We have given up hoping for further riches."

"What a pity! It is a great disadvantage to be short."

The speaker did not herself suffer from this drawback. She had a large voice and a large presence. She filled up the doorway so that the others were not seen.

"Would you mind counting the boxes," she said, addressing no one in particular. "Six of them; six large ones. Blake will tell you how many small parcels there ought to be. This summer in Switzerland, we lost our most valuable piece of luggage, all through the carelessness of the coachman, I am persuaded. Such ignorant people, and so obstinate, the Swiss! Ah, here

is Mr. Malleson, always obliging ! *Now* I feel safe."

"If you will allow me, I will show you the way upstairs," said Malleson, accepting the compliment and offering his arm. "Mr. Ouvry and Felix will see to the luggage."

"Oh, certainly. Why I am standing here I am sure I don't know, for I am half dead with fatigue, except that I fancied there must be a stair leading down to some dark place in front of me, and if there is anything I dread it is a cellar-stair. A tempting of Providence, I call it. Dear Lady Brand, you know, they say she will never walk again without a crutch. Philippa will be sure to fall down ; she is so rash, dear child."

"Not at all, mamma," said a clear ringing voice, that startled Di by its nearness ; "I am as prudent as you. I am only waiting for a guide."

"Let me help you." Di stepped forward and put out her hand timidly. "I am quite used to the darkness, and there is no staircase ; you need have no fear."

"There's a delightful air of mystery about it," said Philippa. "I feel that we are in Spain at last." She felt the gentle touch, and clasping the little brown hand in her own, suffered herself to be led to the light.

Mr. Ouvry and Felix followed almost imme-

diately ; and then there was a dragging up and down of boxes, so many voices calling and arranging, and such disjointed talk, that Di was too bewildered to allow of any keenness of impression. She remembered afterwards that when they reached the large sun-flooded room, all scented with the faint sweet breath of roses, Philippa had stooped, taking both her hands in her own, and had said in that odd, clear voice of hers—

“ We don't need anybody to introduce us, do we? We know each other already, I think. I am Philippa, and you are—— May I call you by your pretty name? ”

She remembered, too, that she had never answered. She had forgotten when she looked into the beautiful, soft face so near her own that she was expected to make any reply. Somehow, it seemed as if the greeting was just what it ought to be, that Philippa could not have spoken in another tone or used other words ; but that she could be so pretty Di had hardly dreamed. It was a flower-like face, pink and white, the brave colour coming and going almost with every breath. And the eyes—homes of sunny laughter, blue as the summer sky outside—eyes to witch the heart of a man. Was it a wonderful thing that Philippa should have many lovers? She kept gazing at her,



even when Philippa had tossed off her hat and had turned away from her, daintily helping herself to grapes. She followed her with her eyes through all the fragmentary talk that was going on, though a sentence here and there reached her, and might at another time have touched a sensitive place.

"I really never expected a daughter, I assure you. I can't think why you never mentioned it when you wrote. And so like the mother! I declare I felt quite ill." This from Mrs. Henshaw. Then, a moment later, the same voice raised again above the others:

"The rooms are rather pokey; but what can you look for? As I tell Philippa, we can't expect to carry our own elegant home with us everywhere; and, after all, it is the people, not the place, that make the home." This with a sentimental droop of the voice.

Mr. Malleson, who was addressed, bowed with a fine gravity.

"Of course, everything is shockingly arranged. I always remark that in lodging-houses the furniture is arranged to give it the most repulsive appearance; but with your good taste, Mr. Malleson, and with our dear Mr. Chester to guide us, we shall soon correct that little fault."

"Di's attention was now arrested, and she

looked across at Malleson, while a demure smile curled the corners of her mouth. Mrs. Henshaw caught that fugitive glance, and it did not pass unrecorded. For a few moments her thoughts were not pleasantly busy; for some unaccountable reason she seemed to resent Di's existence.

The conversation now dwindled into a plaintive monologue on the lady's part. The other speakers became hearers. There was a something about Mrs. Henshaw that compelled your unwilling attention. She had been very handsome as a young woman, and was so still; but even if this had not been the case you would always have had to look at her before you looked at any one else. There are some women who insist on this, and who gain their end by a thousand little artifices which they practise almost unconsciously. Mrs. Henshaw was not accomplished in *finesse*; she simply talked; she addressed no one in particular, and thus secured many listeners. She disliked draughts of air and cats and mice, she suffered from cold feet, she had a weakness for wearing a little shawl about her shoulders. These small idiosyncracies and a thousand other personal particulars, whole armies of likes and dislikes, of feelings and fancies, she was ready to marshal before you. Her secrets you were liberally invited to

share. You became her confidant whatever your disposition towards the office.

Before she had completed the history of her journey, her sufferings at this point, her relief at the other, the gentlemen had all manifested an unaccountable desire to slink away. Ralph began to remember that he had a certain amount of "copy" to supply before evening. Mr. Ouvry reminded Deonys that the travellers must be sorely in want of rest and refreshment, and that it was thoughtless of her to deprive them of it by her presence. Felix Chester murmured something about his "traps" being very much in the way—in fact, blocking up the lobby.

"Yes," said Philippa, in her clear young voice, before any one else could speak, "we are all tired, every one of us. One gets tired from so many different causes. I, for one, am tired of being quiet so long. And besides, mamma is only waiting till you all go away to eat some grapes."

"Philippa, I beg—on what authority——"

"Yes, mamma dear," said the irrepressible young lady, meekly, "I do happen to know my authority for once—for a wonder. It was Lord Byron, wasn't it, who said that women should never be seen eating? But one does not take Lord Byron seriously nowadays, does

one, Mr. Malleson? And he can't ever have been so thirsty as I am."

She held up the empty stalk of a grape cluster and looked at them all; her lips breaking into a smile as if she were a penitent who felt assured of pardon beforehand. She had fastened a rose at her throat, and she looked so pretty that her mocking pertness was too lightly forgiven.

And then she was not pert at all, but very tender and almost grave when she went up to Deonys, and asked her in a whisper if she would come and sit with her later in the evening.

"No, let me come to you instead, if I may," she added hastily. "That would be much better, if you don't mind."

Mrs. Henshaw had again launched on the full tide of talk, and the others were echoing her vagrant sentiments like a Greek chorus.

Yes, it was fortunate the weather was so much cooler. She would like the climate, no doubt. A night's rest, that was what she wanted. They were all unanimous on this point, and grew quite animated over it.

Under cover of this volume of sound Di found courage to make her reply very eager. "Do come; in the evening is the best time, for I shall be quite alone. I shall like it so much."

"Then it is a promise," said Philippa gaily. "Here is my seal to it." She stooped her tall head and kissed the blushing face held up to her.

As she turned to go, Di suddenly encountered Mr. Chester's glance. It was frank and pleasant and a little amused. She had not thought of looking at him before, all her attention having been given to Philippa, and now she felt some surprise. He was not what she had expected him to be. Then she had a sudden suspicion that he was laughing at her, and her cheeks grew hot. Philippa had noticed the look too. She put up her chin and pouted.

"You seem to be amused," she said, with a touch of defiance.

"Forgive me," he answered gravely, but still with the laugh in his eyes. "I felt interested, and, if you will allow me to say so, envious."

"I know what you think about women's friendships." She glanced at him over her shoulder.

"And you value my opinion about as much as you did that of Byron a moment ago. It is unkind of you to give Miss Ouvry so bad an impression of my wisdom."

"Oh, she shall find you out for herself! I promise not to prejudice her one way or another," she answered, with the sudden smile

that was one of her many charms. "I am not the one to disturb another's faith in human nature. There! wasn't that exactly like one of mamma's speeches! I think you had better go, Mr. Chester, for I am growing quite moral."

Felix and his cousin crossed the square together. Felix put his hand on the other's shoulder. There was an old and strong attachment between the cousins, but as they were both Anglo-Saxons they did their best to repress any manifestations of it. Felix, who was an impulsive young fellow, managed less ably than the other.

"Well?" said Ralph briefly.

"Well," Felix echoed affectionately, "you are just the same old man, as Bohemian as ever."

"I would have ordered a new suit from London if you had given one longer warning," said Ralph, glancing sarcastically at the perfectly dressed traveller keeping step with him.

"A man wouldn't be likely to ask you the address of your bootmaker, I must admit," said Felix, looking down at his own neat toes with a smile.

"What did you come for?" Ralph asked, ignoring this remark. He was used to the liberties taken by this young man.

"Suppose it was to see you."

"We'll dispense with that little fiction," said Ralph politely. "I should rather have asked what did they bring you for?"

"That question must be approached with diffidence. Perhaps they thought I was a nice young man; perhaps they had an eye to the tickets and the custom-house officers and the luggage, where one of my sex comes in useful, as Mrs. Henshaw was kind enough to assure me. Here we are, at any rate, and you may as well make the best of us. I hope they can give a fellow some dinner, without keeping him starving for an hour or two. I've had nothing since we left Burgos."

"There are your rooms," said Ralph, leading the way. "I dare say they can give you something at once, if you don't care to wait for *table d'hôte*."

He pursued his inquiries no further. If there had been anything to tell, Felix would have told it all in the first breath. There was evidently nothing of urgent importance to tell.

"The rooms will do capitally," said Felix, looking round him, ready to be pleased with everything. "Neat, but not gaudy. My appetite for gilded clocks would have been satisfied with one specimen, but as they seem made to be looked at and not to go, it doesn't much matter. You'll stay and dine?"

"Thanks," said Ralph, picking up his stick; "but as this is my hour for going down to the House you can get off cheap. Perhaps you'll ask me the next time at an hour when you know there's a chance of my being able to accept."

"I'll order a special banquet of fish—brain-food, you know." But Ralph made a dignified retreat in the middle of this impertinent speech.

Deonys had, meantime, gone upstairs, feeling a little bewildered, perplexed, and yet pleased. Life promised to take on a new aspect under the guidance of this new girl friend; to possess a zest and flavour it had hitherto lacked. She thought a long time about Philippa, trying to arrange her impressions. She was very glad her father did not come and ask her how she liked these old friends of his, for she was not sure that she liked Mrs. Henshaw at all. It was much easier to be sure that she should like Philippa. But Mr. Ouvry did not come to ask any embarrassing questions. He had gone out to the café or the club; and she had the afternoon silence to do her thinking in. Her mind glanced once or twice at Felix Chester, this man with the happy name and the sunny look. No, he was not at all what she had expected; he was younger, for one thing, less remote than Ralph Malleson, for instance, from her experiences—



younger, brighter, more handsome. In truth he was very handsome in the broad-shouldered, fair-haired, English style of manly good looks. His eyes were of a clear blue—eyes that returned your glance kindly and with a great frankness, a frankness without limitation. His teeth were white and even; he showed them when he smiled, and his smile came readily. His clothes were always just what they ought to be. He was gentlemanly without thinking much about it; and if there was in his whole air and bearing a hint of taking the world very lightly and cheerfully, you felt that it was easily pardonable in the owner of a substantial bank account.

Something in this fashion he presented himself to Deonys as she sat alone pondering over these new acquaintances. To this pleasant picture there was added the vivid interest of his being the possible and very probable, lover of Philippa Henshaw. Over that high and sacred mystery—the love of lovers—her imagination hovered timidly. Already Philippa's interests were becoming her own; Philippa's supposed pangs and tremors, doubts and waverings, were born anew in her. Why else should her heart feel heavy, when she remembered her old, life-long friend, Ralph Malleson? And yet—and yet, was it not very good, supremely good to be young?

Downstairs Miss Philippa exhibited the self-possession of a young person to whom such questions had long since grown stale. She was wandering about the room, her head thrown back, her hands clasped ever so lightly behind, stopping now and then to give a careless assent to her mother's talk, now and then to examine a picture or piece of furniture and to make her comment on it.

"I know who chose this chair," she said, looking with approving eyes at the low seat in its corner by the window. "Nobody but Mr. Malleson could have guessed my fancy for a straight back; and it is just my colour, too. I call that a charming attention."

"Nonsense, Philippa!" Mrs. Henshaw spoke with a tinge of unwonted sharpness. "You are always imagining things, child. Mr. Malleson had nothing to do with the ordering of the furniture. If he had, I am sure he would have remembered to get an American rocking-chair for me. He was always so kind in studying my little whims. That chair must belong to the house, and an uglier suite I am sure I never saw!"

Philippa hummed a snatch of a song, but she made no reply. One day later, when they were for a moment alone, she took occasion to thank Mr. Malleson very prettily for the attention she

found a gathering. She had at that time discovered the uses of the table as well, and was inclined not to go to bed.

Miss Malleeson having to her own satisfaction proved Philippa to be in the wrong, grew but more good-natured. She wore a loose morning-gown, and rested on a sofa, smoking cigarette. Her talk was curiously varied. When the English maid who had traveled with them came into the room to display some dress that had suffered detriment on the journey, or to ask for orders, her remarks became general, which the silent Blake had withered till they passed once more into personalities. Towards Blake

who knew everything that concerned her mistress—she practised discretion; but where was the use of being discreet to Philippa?

"Really, Mr. Malleeson is very much improved," she said on one of these occasions. "I always thought there was something aristocratic about his nose; and did you ever notice how small his hands and feet are?"

"No," said Philippa, pausing before a blue vase that held one or two of the Seville roses. "What would be the use of discovering any good points in a plain and poor Mr. Malleeson? If I remember rightly, we used to consider him very ordinary looking."

"You are so difficult to please, Philippa.

Now I always thought there was something very nice and refined about his expression; and nobody could for a moment fail to perceive that he is a gentleman. You will bear me out that I always said that of him, though he did go about rather shabbily dressed. But then, you know, when one's position is assured one can afford to do that."

"I see," said Philippa, with extreme simplicity, "that is why our clothes are so expensive. How clever you are to discover all these things, mamma; and how very stupid I must have been, for, of course, the heir to a baronetcy must have been good looking, and I even imagined his feet were clumsy! I dare say it was his boots. A baronet may wear bad boots as well as shabby clothes, mayn't he, especially if he has an aristocratic nose?"

Philippa's eyes were bright with audacious fun, but her mother was hardly listening.

"I didn't congratulate him," she said. "I must take a quieter opportunity. He is just a little difficult—don't you think?"

"If you mean difficult to congratulate, yes. It would seem a sort of impertinence to wish such a knight of a sorrowful countenance joy. I believe it to be a little fiction of Mr. Chester's."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Henshaw sharply. "You saw the notice of his grandfather's death

in the newspapers, and you wouldn't surely have him so unfeeling as to look pleased over such a melancholy event. I'm sure," she added in the next breath, with feminine inconsistency, "it is a good thing the elder brother died. They say he was terribly dissipated."

"So that one may dispense with the pretence of regret in his case," said Philippa, under her breath. She was in an unwonted mood of mocking bitterness. For the moment she saw things as they were; usually imagination came to her aid, but to-day illusions failed her.

"Of course this fancy of his cousin's that he will not take the title, must be a mistake. If he does not marry it will lapse, and that would never do. I wonder what fortune goes with it?"

"What a pity there isn't a directory to give one something more than people's names and addresses, and the number of their houses. How useful it would be, and how well thumbed," said the young lady carelessly.

"One might find out something about the family in Debrett. Go and ask Blake for it, child. How very well Sir Ralph Malleson sounds!"

"Lady Malleson sounds very well, too. Why don't you say it, mamma?"

"Really, Philippa, you are quite indelicate!"

Of course, one must wish the poor young man to marry; but he is not at all likely to think of you, if that is what you mean, after the way you have behaved."

"Not at all likely; we are quite agreed on that point," said Philippa, calmly, intent on draping a curtain to her mind. "But still my idea of a directory is an excellent one. What plain sailing it would be, and how safe one would feel! Only, we might all grow a little stupid if we had no more discoveries to make about each other."

"I am sure I don't know what you mean. It is such bad taste to talk in that mystifying way!" Mrs. Henshaw's beautiful daughter was often a puzzle to her mother.

"Don't you, mamma? Then here is a specimen: Felix Chester, young, handsome, and wealthy. Inclined to matrimony, and on the outlook for a charming wife. A most fascinating youth; possibly a trifle fickle; but then so rich! Ralph Malleson—we can hardly fill in the sketch till we know the worth of the title. Philippa Henshaw—oh, she is easily described. A young woman of no family in particular, and with no fortune but her face. Anxious to make the best bargain possible. On view. None but solid, eligible young men need apply."

Mrs. Henshaw listened aghast. She regarded the tall, supple figure with severe displeasure. The glance was lost on Philippa, whose face was towards the moving crowd outside.

"I am ashamed of you!" she cried. "I really think you are growing quite coarse and vulgar." She was honestly rather shocked: she made the same distinction that we most of us do between our thoughts and our spoken words. Philippa's mind might travel where it chose—one could not curb its wanderings—but that she should speak of such things!

"Perhaps it is vulgar,"—the girl spoke in a subdued voice—"but the truth often is vulgar."

"I thought I had trained you to be a lady. I am sure I have spent enough on your education; but you have none of my natural refinement of character."

Philippa listened in silence to the motherly lecture. Mrs. Henshaw took the opportunity of airing other grievances at the same time; but the girl's mind lingered on one point. She could have told, if she chose, who it was that first taught her the value to set on her beauty; the end she was to gain by means of it. But then she had accepted the teaching; she had practised the lessons; the time for reproaches was past. She had a lingering, dusky sense of honour, this proud girl, and often held her

peace when hot words tempted her. She woke out of her reflections to hear her mother say—

“I don’t wonder Mr. Levison gave you up, if you talked to him like that.”

“Mr. Levison,”—she smiled a little—“I did not talk much to him.”

“It is all clear to me now. I am the most unfortunate of mothers,” Mrs. Henshaw continued plaintively. “I have sacrificed home and friends, and all my comforts, to save you from the gossip of that affair, and you requite me by talking like this the very first day !”

“Pardon me, mamma,” said Philippa gravely ; “but I think you never quite understood ‘that affair,’ as you call it. I had the honour of declining Mr. Levison’s hand, not he mine. I could not have married any one who was so ugly. It would have suggested such unpleasant comparisons, and one didn’t wish his feelings to be hurt. To be sure, he dressed perfectly ; but then he couldn’t very well have gone about in old clothes, since he had no blue blood to shine through his shabbiness.”

“I didn’t think of such things when I married your poor papa,” said Mrs. Henshaw, reprovingly ; “no one would call him good-looking, poor man (I am thankful you take after me, child). But then I always had a strong sense of duty.”



"I am afraid I don't inherit it. Perhaps papa's artistic instincts have descended to me instead. He had the good taste to prefer beauty, at any rate."

Mrs. Henshaw had a dim sense that there was a lurking compliment wrapped up in this remark, but she could not feel sure. Philippa had such an odd way of saying things, and it was very unpleasant when you couldn't tell what a person meant.

"I do love truth," she was wont to say. "You can't speak too plainly, so long as you are honest; that mystifying way that people have nowadays is really so ill-bred." She was beginning a second little lecture to this effect when Blake entered, desiring to know whether her mistress wished an evening dress left out. Her attention was readily diverted into this new channel. Whether to dress on the chance of visitors, or to deny herself, and accept comfort instead in the shape of her dressing-gown, her novel, and the sofa, became the question of the moment.

"Do you think any one will come to-night, love?"

"If you mean will Mr. Chester come or Mr. Malleeson, I think not. We are expected to be very tired."

"Well, of course, I am dreadfully worn out ;

I have not your strength. Still, you know, one must not always think of oneself; and if any one should come——”

Philippa left the room, not caring to know the final decision. She had her own plans for the spending of the evening, and she began to look towards the hour when she might join Di as towards a refuge.

She shut herself up in her own bedroom. It was a bare little place, in spite of Di's attempts to make it cheerful and homelike; but she cared nothing for its bareness. It was her own, and she could lock herself in and cease from any strife of tongues.

She walked once or twice up and down the narrow length of carpet. Here, then, in this strange land, she was to—— Well, what was she to do? She went to the mirror; she leaned her two elbows on the table, making a frame of her hands for her chin and her dimpled cheeks. She looked at herself gravely, almost heavily. There were times, as now, when she hated and grudged her beauty. She liked to believe that but for this fatal gift she would never have been betrayed into untrue and misleading ways, as if ugliness had a monopoly of virtue.

“I wish I had been plain like you, you poor, dear, unloved, despised papa,” she said, gathering her straight brows into a frown, “and then

perhaps there would have been some little chance of my being good. Plain-looking people are always good; they have no temptations, I suppose."

## CHAPTER V.

"O life! how pleasant is thy morning!"

"O gioventu! Primavera della vita."

It was a pretty picture on which her eyes rested an hour or two later. Deonys stood by the French window which was wide open, one hand grasping the folds of the curtain and holding them back. The balcony was freed from its awning; the light, transparent and golden, touched her hands and her dress; wings were fluttering all about her, flashing, bronze, blue, snow-white in the slanting sun-rays; one bold bird had alighted on her wrist and was feeding out of her open palm; she was chiding it, coaxing the others, talking soft and low in the liquid Spanish as familiar to her as her own tongue. One moment the red feet clasped the iron bar of the railing; the next, a sudden panic set the airy wings again in motion, arching, wheeling about her head with a soft, whirring

sound, closing only to spread themselves and fan the air anew.

Philippa stood in the doorway, and looked at it all. Her thoughts flew to Venice. She saw again the Campanile, rosy with the last sunlight; the dream church—a “jewel heap” of rare colour and form—the home and haunt of a hundred privileged pensioners, to whom its sacred places are no mystery. She too, after the fashion of other English girls, had fed the saucy pigeons in the great Venice square. She had done other things in Venice that she could remember with less unmingled pleasure. She thought of Hilda, the lonely and austere maiden in her gaunt, old tower that aspires to reach the blue Roman sky. Hilda is there no longer, and her doves have flown elsewhere.

“They have come to you; they take you for their lost mistress, wise creatures,” she said, dancing up with a smile.

Di turned with her slow, shy look of pleasure to welcome her. The startled birds took flight.

“Never mind; they will come back again, the foolish, frightened things. Sit down here,” she said, drawing forward her own little chair. “It is cool now; I think this is the pleasantest hour of all the day.”

“No, you must sit there,”—Philippa pulled her down with gentle force—“and I here, on

the stool at your feet. It is the penitent's place; and I've a strong suspicion that I've been wicked this afternoon."

Di smiled as she obeyed. There was no malice in the beautiful, dark-fringed eyes—a little wistful, as it happened, at the moment—into which her own were looking.

"I am so glad you came," she said simply; "I thought you might be too tired, or find things to do."

"I am never tired—never. We are old travellers, you know, and soon shake into our corners. Besides, good old Blake is invaluable."

"Who is Blake?" Di asked, wishing to understand everything.

"Mamma calls her our lady's maid—it sounds better—but she is really a maid-of-all-work. Why she stays with us, I'm sure I don't know, except that I think she has a lingering scrap of liking for me. She was my nurse when I was small."

"Like my Concha. It is nice to have an old friend, a woman friend like that about one. Only you have your mother."

Di stopped abruptly. Any allusion to her own loss seemed like an approach to that debatable ground that had been labelled dangerous. Already she began to feel the fetter of her promise."

"I have my mother," Philippa echoed, with a little laugh. "Do you envy me that privilege?"

"Yes," said Deonys, very low. She hesitated and then said slowly, "I mean I wish I had mine."

"Then I wish you had," Philippa said impulsively. "If you cared for each other that would make everything easy; when the caring is absent things become complicated, you understand. What wouldn't I give to have one great, strong liking for anything or any one!" She clasped her hands behind her head and looked absently in front of her. "There would be some hope of my reformation, then!"

"Don't talk like that," said Di, a little puzzled and a little pained; "it is all nonsense."

"Which is all nonsense? my indifference, or my reformation?"

"Your indifference, of course. You are not indifferent; that, at least, is not true."

"Truest truth," said Philippa, with a great appearance of earnestness. "A heart was forgotten when I was made. I have something that does duty for it, I believe—a blood-pump, isn't it? But what sentiment I was once capable of has long since been used up. I could have cared for my father, I think, if he had lived. I was called after him, you know, and

that is why I submit with so good grace to my ugly name. Poor old dad! It was the only thing that was ever done to please him."

"You loved him; you must love others. I'd like you to care for me a little." Di put out her hand and touched the fine hair that the sun was shining on.

"Don't care for me too much." Philippa shook her head. "I am a disappointment to everybody who does. And yet, why shouldn't you?" she broke off gaily. "I like to be loved."

"I love you now. I think I must always care for you, whatever happens."

Deonys said it out of the warm impulse of an irresistible friendliness. It was her first friendship. Her affection was pure and undissipated; it had not been exhausted on a score of school-companions, or diluted on reams of paper. Long afterwards, when a mist of tears had risen between her and this beautiful, brilliant face, she remembered her words and was glad she had been faithful to them.

"Now let us talk of other things," said Philippa, with a touch of impatience. "Yourself, for instance."

"I have no history," Di said, after some serious pondering.

Philippa laughed at her solemn tones.

"I have," she said significantly. "Ah, a



nice little history ; but I am not going to tell you mine, not I. I am going to ask you questions. I want to know where you got your odd, pretty name from. Is it Spanish ? ”

“ Oh no ”—Di smiled—“ it is as English as yours. Papa found it in an old baptismal register in a little village in Essex, I believe, and he liked it. It was repeated often in that old book, spelt differently, but always the same name.”

“ In Essex, you said ? ”

“ Yes ; have you been there ? Mamma came from there, I think,” said Di, with a touch of eagerness.

“ No,” said Philippa carelessly ; “ I’ve never been there. Look here, I am going to call you Di, as your father does. Be thankful you have a name that can be shortened. Nobody ever discovered an abbreviation for mine that wasn’t hideous. Somebody once proposed Phyllis ; but it was a case of playing it to his Corydon, and I would have none of it,” she said, with a mischievous smile. “ Mr. Malleson was right ; you may take away a syllable, but you only add to its ugliness.”

“ Then you knew him very well ? ” Di asked a little curiously. This, at least, was not forbidden ground.

“ We knew him—yes, as well as most people.

But I dare say you have discovered before this that he is a very mysterious gentleman."

"Mysterious?" said Di, laughing. "Why, I've known him all my life."

"But he lived half his life before we were born, my dear. They say he was dreadfully wild in his youth, and was cut off with the proverbial shilling, like the heroes of novels. He has been living on that shilling ever since."

"I don't believe it!" said Di indignantly; "people will say anything."

"I think myself it's that air of reserve he has that gave rise to all the rumours about him. If people are mysterious, the world always puts a bad construction on their silence. I dare say they have provided him with as many skeletons as one cupboard will hold."

"I think they had better let him alone."

"I found out the wisdom of that long ago," said Philippa, shaking her head. "Once I was foolish enough to fancy I could understand him, but I soon discovered it was all the other way." There was just a touch of bitterness that did not escape the listener. "Sometimes I used to think those quiet eyes of his read us through and through. I wonder what he told you about us; tell me, Di!" she urged, entertaining this new idea eagerly. "Tell me, quick!"

"But it wouldn't be right." Di looked very

uncomfortable; she had not acquired the art of gilding unpalatable facts. "There are some things he said that would please you."

"And some things that would not please me!" Philippa laughed. "I know him; he has a genius for saying uncomfortable things."

"However he may talk, he is all that is good and kind," Di said earnestly. "You say you saw him often; but I have known him all my life; he is my dearest friend."

She was impelled to defend him. She could not understand Philippa. Was he not more than a friend to her once?

"And this dearest friend warned you against me? Di, my child, you must learn to hide your blushes and those honest eyes of yours if you would conceal anything from me; they are traitors and betray you. Now I will tell you something to console you. I like this Mr. Malleson—this kind and true Mr. Malleson—a little more, perhaps, certainly not less, because he told you I was a wicked girl and a dangerous friend. He is honest, at least; and that is what we do not all aspire to be."

"But he didn't talk like that!" Di cried eagerly. "If he grumbled a little—and you know how men grumble—it was because he was cross, or tired, or hot. The hot weather spoils

everybody's temper; even the padre gets cross sometimes. And, oh, surely you know Ralph better than to mistrust him."

"Oh, I bear him no grudge," said Philippa lightly. "It takes a good deal more than that to destroy my friendship for a man; and we were friends once. I like men best. I know it isn't good taste to say so, but it is true; and wasn't I upholding the truth a minute ago? Of course, men have their weaknesses, but their virtues are more magnificent than ours. And so I like them best (you always excepted, Di); and I'll forgive this particular one that he doesn't like me. Isn't that magnanimous?"

Di was spared a reply by the entrance of Concha, who ushered in the solemn Blake and introduced her in dumb show, with that shade of contempt for her ignorance of Castilian speech which is essentially a "thing of Spain."

"What is it, Blake?" Philippa looked up with a laugh. "Can't you make these barbarians understand you? What's the Spanish for hot water, Di; I know that is what she wants. It's a most important phrase, if you look at its place in the conversational guide-books; its almost as useful as 'My sisters will have some med-lars,' and 'Thou wouldst have some mutton.'"

Blake looked severe disapproval on this levity.

"It's Mr. Chester, Miss Philippa," she said, "and your mamma wants you to come downstairs."

"Oh, but I'm not coming." She gave her answer with rapid decision. "Tell mamma—anything you like, but say I can't come. Now, you dear, good woman, don't look so reproachful. See here, my hair, my dress, too; you know you wouldn't let me appear in this old gown."

"But, Miss Philippa——"

"But, Blake——" She jumped up and went over coaxingly to the old woman. "I've made up my mind, and you know what that means. I find it more amusing, ever so much more amusing, to stay here than to sit downstairs and join Mr. Chester in listening to mamma."

She had her way, as she generally had; and, after a little further urging, Blake withdrew.

"There, Di!" she exclaimed, going back to her footstool. "After the confession I made a moment ago, isn't this an immense proof of my regard for you?"

"I am glad you should like to stay with me; but——"

"But you disapprove of me all the same?"

"If your mother wanted you—and one's guest——"

"One's guest is sacred? But I see this particular guest very often, and if he comes unin-

vited? I know what you mean." She put her hand up, and very softly touched the lips that would have bravely given utterance to the truths her heart prompted. She rose and went behind Di's chair, leaning over it. "Di," she said, and her voice took a new vibration and was almost sad in its intonation, "it is quite true what Mr. Malleson said, or implied, if he didn't say it in so many words: I am not a good friend for you. I have lived in—oh, you could not guess what an atmosphere. Never mind all that now. I tell you I am not good, not like you, but I wouldn't hurt you, I think. And when I come here, if I may come, it will be because some instinct tells me it is a safe and sheltered place. I abhor sentiment, and all this sounds very sentimental, but once for all I may say it, and trust you will understand."

Di put up her arms and drew the beautiful face down, till cheek rested against cheek. Did she not understand?

"Come often, as often as you will," she said; "but don't say such hard things of yourself. I won't believe you when you talk like that." Then, with quick intuition, guessing at the revulsion of feeling that was sure to follow this rare betrayal, she said cheerfully, "Now, you must stay and have supper with me. The

father and Ralph have gone to a meeting at which Castelar is to speak, and they will be late, for that, you know, is a thing not on any account to be missed."

"Castelar?" said Philippa, still keeping her post behind the other's chair, but speaking lightly. "Will you think me quite a Vandal if I tell you that 'Castelar' conveys nothing to me at all? Who, or what is Castelar?"

Di laughed.

"Ask Ralph," she said; "he calls him the most eloquent of living men. And, indeed, his words are beautiful—like music. He makes the dullest matter seem full of interest, till you wonder you could ever have thought it dry or tiresome. Some day we shall get an order from one of the Legations for the Cortes and go to hear him."

"Oh, politics! I'm afraid the subject, in Spain, at least, is too lofty for me. At home I call myself a Liberal, I don't know why, except that it seems to fit in with our ways better than the more aristocratic Conservative, for if we are anything at all we are not Conservative—my good mamma and I; we are ready to blow round with any wind that promises to favour us. But now, Di, I will tell you what provokes me very much, and it is this: whenever I proclaim my political creed I find some one ready

to say very smilingly and politely, 'Oh, you ladies, say what you will, you are all of you the truest Conservatives at heart.' Do you know what it is to be pulled up suddenly with a general formula like that? As if women were made exactly alike, and had but one size and pattern of mind!"

Philippa's cheeks were blushing yet. She spoke just for mere speaking's sake, out of a desire to banish her last words from her own and her companion's mind.

"No," said Di laughing, as she moved about the room, and made deft preparations for supper. "This time it is I who am stupid and ignorant. Your Liberal and Conservative are equally a puzzle to me. Here I learn a little because I hear the father and Ralph talking."

"Tell me what it is the right thing to believe, then."

"Oh, there are innumerable parties, but——," she lifted her head with a little proud movement—"but I am for the king."

"Then I'll be for the king, too! He is young and nice looking, isn't he?"

"They treat him shamefully," said Di hotly; "but you will soon see all that for yourself. And you must get Ralph to explain about the different parties; he laughs at my mistakes."

"But he allows you to pick up what crumbs



of wisdom you may chance to catch as they fall from his lips. Oh, this good, kind Mr. Malleson!" said Philippa, with that half-mocking ripple of laughter that no one was able to resist, "he is just like other men. They always want the large web of cloth out of which to shape their opinions; the shreds and corners that are left over after the process we are made welcome to, and they laugh at the patchwork we fashion out of these rags. This is one of the few faults I find in men, you will notice; and I tell you, Di, if we were women of spirit it is a thing that would make us angry."

"But in the meantime," said Di gravely, "we are only two hungry girls, and here is the omelet."

"And the omelet is an irresistible argument," she answered, going up to inspect it. "Good-bye to our grievances for a little. Oh, how good it smells! Do you know, I have chatted myself into quite a savage hunger!"

"Come, then, and eat."

They sat down at a little table placed near the window. The lamp was lighted, but the curtains were not yet drawn; the night air wandered in laden with a refreshing coolness. The stars were as yet few and faint in the wan sky, but in the plaza beneath them, and in the

many streets that branch off from it, there was a net-work of golden points growing every moment brighter as the twilight fled before the fast-coming darkness.

"I think this is the very best time to see the *Puerta del Sol*," said Di—"by gaslight. I have seen it once with a full moon shining on it, and that was even more beautiful. The lamps were out and there was no one abroad except our *Seréno*. One might have thought it an enchanted city in fairyland, and Domingo the prince grown old and grey in his wanderings."

"Ah! the gaslight and the people for me!" said Philippa. "The more people the better. I could not live in the country, and especially not in the English country. I feel my spirits rise whenever I leave that bleak, austere island of ours. I should not break my heart if I were never to see it again."

This seemed to Di a sort of treason.

"I have never been there," she said; "but it is the dream of my life to go."

"Ah! don't go," said Philippa gently. "You are, what you are—just because you were never there."

"But you? You are English. I might take the risk, I think."

"I am a citizen of the world," said Philippa gravely. "To have been born here

or there does not make you one thing or another—— ”

“ Unless you happen to have been born in Scotland,” Di interrupted, with a twinkle of fun in her eyes; “ that settles your opinions for ever. I have a Scotch cousin.”

“ I haven't, though I have been in the north as I have been everywhere else. My experiences came to me in so many different lands ”—— she broke off hastily. “ Shall I tell you a little about our life, Di ? ”

“ Yes,” said Di. She had a suspicion that the recital might pain her, yet she could not refuse to hear it. But for the moment it seemed Philippa had a mind to linger about the outside of her experiences; that inner record which, after all, moulds our visible actions she had the grace to veil. Doubtless she felt that there were many things about her past that the young girl sitting opposite to her would fail to interpret as she had taught herself to interpret them. One does not become a citizen of the world without paying for the privilege. And the price? Suppose it were the fine bloom of girlish guilelessness; the exquisite sensitiveness of youth; the quick vibration of a conscience uneasy at a hint of trespass? Suppose it were these and other things besides?

In whatever way Philippa had bargained for

her knowledge, she imparted it to-night very gracefully, and with the charm she could quickly weave about any subject when she chose. She was extremely familiar with certain phases of continental life; from an English point of view she knew it thoroughly. She had kept her eyes open, and they were eyes that saw quickly and clearly. She described with certain touches of fun and quaint humour that took her listener captive. Di forgot the faint sense of disapproval that had troubled her before in this new friend's talk, while she wandered in her company through sunny France, or golden Italy; looked with her eyes at the stainless Swiss snows, or into the sombre depths of solemn Norwegian fiords. Philippa had been everywhere, it would seem. What a large, full, varied life hers had been.

"Then you won't care for our Spain," she said wistfully. She had been thinking over and planning this and that that was to be shown to her guests, and now—they would care for none of these things. "You have seen so much you will find nothing new here."

"I have found you!"

Philippa rose, and bending over Di, kissed her lightly. At this moment she was her most charming, gentle self. It was just then, when Di's wavering allegiance had come back stronger

than before, that Mr. Ouvry made his appearance. He came in quietly and surprised the two girls, who made a pretty picture. Philippa murmuring absurd and caressing little nothings as she leant over the chair in which Di sat, blushing, laughing, remonstrating, more girlishly gay than he had ever seen his daughter before.

He looked, for so dignified a gentleman, agreeably influenced by the spectacle.

Di's face, which had suddenly grown wistful when she saw him, brightened again under this glance. She had all at once remembered that little caution about the too quick cementing of youthful friendships—remembered it late. But her father's face showed no disapproval; his tone was bland as he said:

"Don't let me disturb you, young ladies. Miss Henshaw, you have taken compassion on my little girl. You must allow me to say with what pleasure I see you under my roof."

"I think it is Di who has taken compassion on me." She went up to him, speaking with a pretty air of deference. "I couldn't help coming. I am afraid I must come very often indeed, if you do not forbid it." She looked up into his face with a frank smile, as if discrediting this possibility.

"My dear young lady, you are most welcome at all hours. You cannot come too often to

please Deonys or me. For your mother's sake, I should have said yesterday, now, with your leave, I say for your own."

This gracious speech Philippa answered with her prettiest smiles. There were those who said Mr. Ouvry was cold and unimpressible; but he was human enough to be pleased with this charming homage.

"And all this time, you poor papa, nobody is thinking of your supper," said Di, who had been making quiet little arrangements for his comfort while the compliments were passing.

"I have had all I require, my child. Ralph and I went to the café after the meeting was over."

"And why didn't Ralph come back with you?"

"He guessed that I should be here," said Philippa.

"That would have been reason the more for his coming," said Mr. Ouvry gallantly; "but the fact is he had work to do. Our good friend takes his work very seriously. He hopes to pay his respects to Mrs. Henshaw to-morrow."

"Mamma will be very kind to him," said the young lady frankly. "I know she is longing to see him."

"He will certainly call. If it isn't too late, I should like to perform that pleasant duty now.

You will perhaps spare Di a few more minutes while I am absent ? ”

“ I will stay gladly,” Philippa answered. “ Mamma is quite alone.” She had long before this noticed Felix Chester cross the square on his way back to the hotel.

Mrs. Henshaw was alone, and sufficiently tired of her own company to accord him a welcome. They talked for a little while on indifferent matters, skirting carefully any allusion to the past about which Di, in her timid fancy, supposed them always to hover. The gentleman was polite as ever ; the lady not less anxious to seize the moment for those little confidences she was apt to make ; but to a subtle ear there was a faint something in all their talk that seemed to suggest a hidden understanding. “ We know each other ; we two have seen into each other’s souls. Still we are people of the world ; let us be very polite, and feign ignorance of those little matters in which we had once a mutual interest.”

Mr. Ouvry had indeed a word to utter that appeared to him more important than the reiterated hopes that the ladies should feel comfortable, or repeated and vague offers of friendly help. But he could wait ; he had great faith in waiting.

His opportunity came to him in one of Mrs. Henshaw’s inconsequent speeches.

“My daughter seems to have taken a great fancy to yours,” she said, with a slight shade of pique, almost as if she would suggest that Di was taking a liberty in allowing herself to be liked. “I must prepare, of course, to be quite neglected. She is a well-grown girl, I must say, and rather pretty, if she knew how to dress; perhaps not quite in my Philippa’s style, but then think what I have spent on that child! A handsome fortune, I assure you.”

“Miss Philippa was worth the expenditure of a fortune, and the result is perfect,” he answered graciously. “As for my daughter, she has had few advantages; but it is a good child, a good child.”

“I am sure I don’t doubt it,” said Mrs. Henshaw indifferently, the talk having ceased to be personal. “But that look of her mother would make me sadly anxious. It really is an extraordinary resemblance; a most unfortunate likeness.”

“I never speak to Deonys of the past,” said Mr. Ouvry, with slow emphasis.

“I should suppose not.”

He passed by this interruption, as if it had been unheard.

“It is my wish that the child should not be told anything relating to her mother’s or my married life. She inherits my sensitive tem-



perament, and—a—she would suffer for my sake."

"You were very unhappy, then?" She looked at him curiously.

"I make no complaint. The past is past. I have no wish to recall it. Nor do I wish Deonys to be troubled with any knowledge of it. I should hold it an unfriendly act in any one who should infringe this wish—this strong wish of mine."

"Dear me!" she broke in, with a touch of asperity, "one would think you were afraid of *my* talking to her about Mary! I am not so fond of dwelling on people who turn out such deceptions. Ingratitude and deceit are things I really cannot pardon; and after the way Mary behaved!"

"Your indignation is just," said Mr. Ouvry, with dignity. "Pardon me if, in dwelling on my own troubles, I for a moment seemed to forget yours. I have forgotten nothing. Who would be less likely than you to recall willingly a part of your life that must have been so painful to you?"

"Well, well," said Mrs. Henshaw, anxious to slip easily away from a topic that made her uncomfortable, "I am sure I am not likely to talk to the girl about her mother; and I only hope she won't turn out like Mary, though I

should be very anxious if I were you. Here is my Philippa at last. Philippa, you dear, naughty child, where have you hidden yourself all evening? And our poor Mr. Chester here too, so attentive and delightful, and going away at last quite disconsolate because I said I was really too tired to talk to him any longer."

"I was very pleasantly employed." Philippa glanced with a smile at Mr. Ouvry. "Perhaps Mr. Chester wouldn't have been so amusing if I had been here."

"I am sure you must be tired too. It is thoughtless of me to detain you." Mr. Ouvry rose and took his leave gracefully. Nobody could have guessed that he had just spoken words charged with hidden meaning, or that his visit had been paid from any other motive than that of common civility.

Philippa looked intently at her mother when he had left; but Mrs. Henshaw was yawning and taking off her bracelets.

"It's a good thing I dressed after all," she said; "but I am as tired as possible. Tell Blake to come to me, child."

## CHAPTER VI.

"If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it  
To the last article."

ABOUT this time Ralph Malleson developed a surprising energy in the matter of early rising. He laid great stress on the heat and on the comparative coolness of those early hours in which the sun shines with a tempered vigour. Yet it had been hotter. Those brief weeks of *infierno* which follow on the heels of the long Spanish *invierno*, had counted out their last moments, and he had found it possible to slumber throughout the allotted hours without undue discomfort. But then, there is no such great virtue in getting up when you can count on pleasant society; and during those fresh, late September mornings two young girls were certain to be discovered in one part or another of the leafy Prado.

Philippa, unlike most fashionable ladies, was

her brightest self in the mornings, more gay than any of the birds that sang so bravely the last poor remnant of summer's full song among the rustling leaves above her head. There was a something unconventional and exceptional about her that formed her chief charm. At these times the little touches of cynicism and of hardness that too often flavoured her talk were wholly absent. She was happy and natural; and her vivacity, her laughter, her beautiful looks all appealed forcibly to Di's sympathies. There was nothing she would not have done for this new friend.

A day or two after Mrs. Henshaw's arrival, the girls had taken the first of those morning walks that afterwards grew into a habit with both. They were resting on one of the many seats that line the long avenue, and Philippa was twining together some flowers she had bought at a street corner as they came. Deonys had taken off her hat, and the soft breeze was stirring her hair and ruffling its smoothness. She sat idly watching Philippa's deft fingers as with quick, nice discrimination she blended the colours harmoniously together.

"Why does your mamma always wish I had been a boy?" she asked suddenly.

Philippa opened her eyes and laughed.

"I thought I was used to mamma's conversa-

tional surprises," she said; "but here is a puzzle."

"I mean, why is she so astonished that I should be a girl?" said Di, lazily swinging her hat. "I'd have been a boy if I could. Then I should have worked for the padre; and I'd have been one of your lovers, Philippa."

"The dearest and best of them."

"I'd have been a true sort of lover, I think," said Di seriously and meditatively; "but I shouldn't have said the silly things they say in books."

"Or out of them."

"You've had a great many, I suppose?" Di looked at her with sudden interest.

"Oh, not so very many," said Philippa modestly. "There, child"—she looked critically at a little bouquet she held away from her, while she examined it slowly—"that will suit you, I think; and never, never let me see you wear pink and yellow together again."

"It was some everlastings our old washer-woman brought me," said Di, by way of excuse for this enormity. "She had taken such pains to arrange them, that I didn't like to hurt her feelings by touching them."

"And so you hurt mine instead by wearing them. There, stoop down and let me fasten this in your hair."

"Oh, but, Philippa," she said, as she obeyed and knelt down at the other's feet, "you have left nothing for yourself—nothing but those scraps."

"Wait till you see what I can make of them. You haven't proper faith in my powers yet."

But any further remonstrance died on Di's lips. She started up suddenly, before the flowers could be fastened in the brown braids, and all the warm colour rushed into her cheeks.

"Look," she whispered, "there is the king!"

"I see Mr. Malleeson," said Philippa calmly. "I noticed him some time ago."

But Deonys had eyes for no one except Don Amadeo, the simple young soldier king, who went afoot like the humblest of his subjects, holding his little son by the hand. In a low carriage, drawn at a slow pace by two ponies, the queen was seated, leaning back among the cushions. The sun touched her pale, fine face. Now and then the walkers turned to say a word to her and draw from her an answering smile.

When Philippa's eyes rested on this fair and gracious presence she rose slowly, and all the flowers fell at her feet. The little prince, with a cry of childish delight, ran to pick them up. She bent, and, with a fine tenderness filled the eager hands stretched out to her till they could hold no more. She was smiling and her soft

colour came and went. The little prince laughed; the blossoms kept dropping as he ran back. It was all over in an instant; and, with a smile and a graceful word of thanks, the little procession passed on.

Ralph Malleson, standing a pace or two apart, had watched the little scene. He thought to himself that he had seldom seen anything prettier than the trio made by the two girls and the child. It was a bit of accidental grouping that would have been an inspiration to an artist; as it was, he was no artist, and he kept his admiration to himself. When he joined them Philippa was saying lightly—

“All gone. The little bunch I tied up for you too. Never mind. You can console yourself that they were coveted by a king.”

But Deonys was not listening.

“Did you notice those men,” she said, turning to Malleson, with all her soul in her eyes—“the cowards! They passed him and that beautiful lady, the queen—passed with their hats on! Oh, he is too good, far too good for them; and the queen, they will kill her with their insults!”

“See what it is to have the honour of reigning over Republican subjects,” he answered. “Even Amadeo is not democratic enough to content them. Never mind, Di; at the moment

he had no eyes for those mannerly gentlemen, and so their small triumph missed its mark."

"You are properly loyal, at least," said Philippa, looking at him with her bright smile. "I saw the sweep of your hat even with the corner of my eye."

"I do it to please Di; she is such a fierce Royalist. As for all this bowing and scraping, according to Mr. Herbert Spencer, it is only a relic of barbarism. It's an instinct we have kept hold of since our savage days."

"Is curtseying an instinct, too?"

"Curtseying, madam, is a poor reminder of the good old custom of bending the knee before the superior sex."

"Please to notice, then, that I curtsey to you," said Philippa, making a fine sweep.

"What are you two talking about?" said Di, with a shade of impatience. She had been following the carriage with absent eyes, and not listening to their idle badinage.

"I was only acknowledging the inferiority of women," said Philippa meekly. "I hope your Miss Barbara won't hear of it. Di, my child, is it permitted to sit down now?"

"Of course, Philippa; don't be absurd."

"Then, perhaps, you will make a little corner for Mr. Malleson. I have something very serious to say to him."



"Pray say on," said Malleson, accepting the offered seat; "I am all ears."

"Well," said Philippa, with greater gravity than she usually allowed herself to show, "I suppose, to begin with, I must congratulate you. You will expect it. Mamma will, I know; but, then, I am not mamma——"

"Most logically put," said Malleson gravely.

"Philippa, what do you mean?" said Di, laughing. "You are not your mamma—is that what you wanted to tell us?"

"I had such a pretty speech all ready," she answered plaintively; "and now you have put it quite out of my head, both of you, with your frivolous interruptions. I suppose you feel very happy, Mr. Malleson, and will not miss my nicely prepared congratulations?"

"At this moment I feel in a state of perfect felicity. If Di would hand over that umbrella, my bliss would be at a height," he answered, as he opened the sunshade, and held it carefully over the brown head that the sun was shining on. "Put on your hat, naughty child," he said to Di aside.

"Ah, but I mean about your new honours." Philippa spoke a little impatiently. "How slow you are to understand! Does being a baronet make people dull, I wonder?"

"I have known baronets who had a small

amount of intelligence," said Malleson, as if weighing the matter seriously, "and I have known baronets who, strange to say, were quite as stupid as untitled mortals. Never having been one myself, I cannot tell you how it affects the intellect."

"But now—you are one now!" she exclaimed impetuously. "Don't try to deny it! Your cousin told us."

"Chester is a youth of a lively imagination," he said carelessly; "or, perhaps he is deep in State secrets. Have you heard it whispered that 'our special correspondent' is to have a corner in 'Debrett' bestowed on him, Di?"

"I have heard nothing."

"No doubt that is it. The remarkable ability of certain Spanish letters has made an impression in high quarters, and they are taking this neat way of expressing their approval. A baronetcy was the least they could offer, for I dare say you have both of you observed what high honours are showered on literary and scientific aspirants by our enlightened country."

"You are laughing, as usual," said Di severely. "I don't believe there is any truth in this story. I am not going to be afraid of you yet, at any rate. Of course if they want to reward you that would be very nice; but I



"No," said Philippa, shaking her head. "There is always one spiteful enough to survive."

"But you don't want them to die, poor little babies!" It was Di who spoke.

"Mr. Malleson is rejoicing that they are born," said Philippa. "What beautiful unselfishness! But you mustn't expect me to reach that sublime height, Di. I did so wish to number a baronet among my friends!"

"I'll introduce you to the elder of the youngsters," said Ralph, smiling at the demure mischief of her face. "If you have any regard for my feelings, you ought to rejoice at my escape. What a target I should have been for the irony of my friends, the owner and wearer of an old title with hardly money enough to procure a decent coat to cover it!"

"But there is the honour—if you knew how much we who never had a grandfather think of a long and honourable descent!"

"Honourable! How do you know it is honourable?" said Ralph fiercely. "Does it make a man virtuous to have a handle to his name? Am I to look up to and reverence a man simply because he has the right to stamp a coronet on his paper? Very likely it was some piece of mean, time-serving policy that won the spurs for us; something I should be

horribly ashamed of if I knew it. Now your great-grandfather——”

“Oh, my great-grandfather!” said Philippa, laughing; “never mind him. I dare say he was excellent in his way; but you can’t convince the world that yours wasn’t much more deserving of notice.”

“Then I suppose the world, of which you know so much, would decline to believe in my gratitude? So be it. All the same, I think it ought to take a substantial shape. What is it that babies, or the mammas of babies, expect in the way of offerings? Lumps of coral, pap-bowls, mugs?”

“Don’t count on me. I must go home and prepare mamma’s mind for the shock,” said Philippa, rising. “I think you had better not call on us to-day, Mr. Malleson. You must give us twenty-four hours to readjust our ideas. Perhaps to-morrow you might venture.”

“Oh, Philippa, don’t go home just yet,” said Di naïvely. “Come with us to the Carrera de S. Geronima. Do you remember that jeweller’s shop we looked into yesterday? I saw such pretty cases of forks and spoons there. Your sister-in-law would like that for her babies, wouldn’t she?” She turned to Ralph.

Of course they went, in spite of Philippa’s protest against deserting to the enemy, and

they spent a happy half hour among the jeweller's treasures of gold and silver.

As they walked he told them a little about his brother's marriage; but not that it had been kept a secret from him till the end when as usual, Roderick had shifted his burdens on to those other willing shoulders.

"Poor old Rod met his wife in India, you know; but he hardly lived to see the youngsters. She brought them to this country after her widowhood."

"Was that why you went home in spring?" Di asked, wondering that Ralph had told her nothing of this before.

He nodded. He did not tell them how little he had been prepared for the summons to welcome these new and unknown relations, whom Roderick had left to his care. Another man might have found the situation to be somewhat ironical; but he was either too unambitious or too indolent to care.

"It was a romantic affair," he said; and he told them some particulars of the meeting with whimsical amusement.

"What was she like?" Di asked, with great sympathy.

"Poor little soul! she was drowned in crape and tears," he said, smiling. "I never got beneath the trappings to the real woman at all."

There isn't much of her, I should say, but what there is seems wholly good. Poor old Rod always liked your clinging, submissive woman."

"I wonder we never heard of her before," said Philippa, with a touch of sharpness. "Do you know, it seems to me very odd that you should have hidden her away like that. Mamma would have been so pleased to befriend her. It would have been such an excellent mission to console the widow of one baronet and the mother of another," she said, with an irrepressibly mischievous smile. "And you never came near us."

"I was wholly taken up in baby cult," he said. "My sister-in-law seemed to think I never could have enough of caressing those two white bundles; and what between my desire of pleasing her and my fear of dropping them, or letting their heads fall off, or breaking their fingers, I assure you I had a hot time of it."

"It was odd that Mr. Chester didn't tell us," said Philippa, still occupied with her wonder.

"Prince Alasnam is a wise young man, but he doesn't know everything," he answered carelessly. "Here is your shop, Di; but don't ruin me altogether."

"But you mustn't be impatient, Ralph," said Di, whose whole sympathy had been enlisted for the widow and her boys. What cared she

that, as the world would say, he had missed his chance in life? "I think you had better buy a newspaper."

"Is it such a serious affair as that?" he said, smiling at her grave face.

It was indeed a very serious affair. Never were gifts more carefully pondered; never did decision seem so difficult. Malleson, who had surrendered the matter to her, watched her over the top of his newspaper with an amused smile, as she stood in grave hesitation before a long row of mugs and spoons spread out on the counter.

Philippa, though always ready to answer any appeal made to her taste, was flitting here and there, peeping at the flashing diamonds and the snow-white pearls relieved against the warm velvet on which they lay. She liked to look at the shining stones; she seemed to have something in common with the brilliancy and colour of the sapphires and emeralds; but she would have liked just as much to linger in a hot-house full of rare blossoms. She had no desire to possess any of this wealth. She had no personal vanity. Her dress, though better made, was as simple as Di's, and was without ornament of any kind. This entire unaffectedness pleased Malleson when he spared a moment to notice it. She could not be un-



conscious of her rare beauty, but the knowledge had ceased to influence her actions which were always perfectly unstudied. She met him with great frankness, without coquetry, without reproach for his withdrawn admiration. If at times her knowledge of his keen insight troubled her, she never showed it.

She seemed to take almost the same pleasure that he did in watching Di's earnest profile: the grave, flexible, child-like mouth, the down-cast, long-lashed eyes bent in serious consideration. Once her glance met Malleson's and they exchanged a mutual smile, a look of sympathy and understanding that did something to scatter doubts on his part and cement their old-new friendship. From that time there was a new gentleness in all the looks and words she addressed to Deonys; it was as if in that glance she had read his secret, the secret he was so slow to discover for himself.

"What, not chosen yet?" she said, going up and laying her hands lightly on the other girl's shoulders. "Why, little one, the baby does not deserve to be born who would not feel proud of that fork and spoon."

"Yes, I think they will do," said Di, with a small sigh of satisfaction. "Look, they are exactly alike; and here is a place for their names, unless they have each a great many."

That was a pleasant morning, and it lingered in Malleson's memory. He thought of it often during the day, when he was busying himself over that "copy" that kept the British public enlightened as to Spanish affairs. If his political visions were for the moment tinged with rose-colour, it is to be pardoned him, for often while he wrote he remembered how Di had looked an hour or so before, and what she had said.

He had told her, what he had not told to Philippa, how an old estrangement had widened into a breach that could not be crossed, and how his grandfather had died a little while ago unreconciled.

"But you have forgiven him—since he is dead?" she asked.

"There are some things one is not called on to forgive," he answered, with so dark a look on his face that she asked no more. "He thought himself in the right; he would have thought my forgiveness, if I had extended it to him, an unbounded piece of impertinence; and, I dare say, I should have met any overtures on his part much in the same manner." He smiled a little bitterly. "Di, I wish you to forget all this. If Mrs. Henshaw had not kindly busied herself with my affairs, you should never have heard a syllable of it."

"I will forget it, if you are sure it has not vexed you?"

"Vexed me? No. Have you no faith in my disinterestedness?"

"Oh, you mean about the babies! Of course I am very glad about them. You would not have made a nice baronet"—she looked at him seriously,—“and it would have changed everything. If they want to reward you, I hope they will think of some other way.”

He had answered fervently that he hoped “they” would; and as he would probably be offered, when the time came, a great choice of rewards, he could consult her wishes about them.

But though he laughed he was earnest enough in thinking he had made a great escape. Never was man who cared less for honours or distinctions of any kind, who hugged his insignificance more complacently, and yet it pleased him hugely that this girl with the grave eyes should agree with him, should consent to his love of comfortable obscurity. This calling up of what was past in his life was most distasteful to him. He had chosen to renounce any portion he might have in it long ago, to bury his own boyhood, as it were, and to begin a new life upon its grave. He wanted no resurrection of his dead hopes and aspirations.

The new life suited him ; he was content. But he had escaped ; those little lives had come between him and worry, if nothing more, between him and a hateful revival of an old skeleton. And Deonys had congratulated him. The child had a fine sympathy, a quick womanly discernment.

So he scribbled and dreamed, and his letters that day had a lightness of fancy they did not often wear, and were touched with his own rare happiness. What excellent reviews some loquacious travellers might have received, had it been their good fortune to come under his eye while this rosy mood lasted.

Felix Chester never joined in these early walks. He had a great many ways of enjoying himself, but this was not one of them. Such visits as he paid to Mrs. Henshaw—and they were frequent—he paid in the evening. Deonys heard his fresh laughter sometimes as she leaned over the balcony. Once or twice she distinguished Philippa's tones, airy and light, crossing Mrs. Henshaw's monotonous monologue.

This solitary watch on the balcony was a little lonely sometimes, a little more lonely, perhaps, than it used to be before she had known the exquisite pleasure of companionship.

Mr. Ouvry generally absented himself in the

evenings. His constitution required the bracing of a little society after the restraint of an afternoon passed in sleep, which he also declared to be necessary to his well-being. Di fostered both fancies with a tender regard, and was used to combat with much energy his elaborate but faint protest at leaving her. If you had asked her she would have told you he was the most unselfish of men. He was a member of the Athenæum. She would very likely have added that the other members of that august institution could in no wise have spent an evening without him.

Mr. Malleson always listened to this assertion in respectful silence, but he was ready enough to take advantage of her faith in her father's popularity to share her solitude. He was so old in her eyes, and so long and of such distant date the friend of the house, that there seemed nothing more simple and natural than that he should come, and that she should welcome him. Indeed, she never reasoned on the matter at all. The knowledge that a little rubbing shoulders with society very soon teaches, had fortunately been denied her. He used fervently to hope that she would long be deprived of it. He prized this fine quality of simplicity above most things. So it was that she only looked up and smiled when he came to her on the

evening of that day, when they had together provided silver spoons for the babies born to this fortune; looked up and smiled, and went on with the trifling bit of work she held in her hand, and was pretending to be very busy over.

"Do you know," she said, as if their talk had been but a moment interrupted, "I've been thinking over all the things you said to me that afternoon a week ago, out there on the balcony, and I feel sure that you must have been very cross."

"As that," he answered, out of the depths of his armchair, "seems to be my normal condition, no doubt you are right."

"No." She shook her head. "You are often lazy, and you laugh at me sometimes, but that is to be expected. But you are not often cross; I must do you that justice. You are not as growlsome as some men I know; but that night you were more than cross—you were unjust."

"And now I am to be punished for it?"

"If confession means punishment, then you are to be punished," she said, speaking gravely, but with a betraying smile round her lips. "You are to acknowledge that you were wrong."

"I always do that when the argument is with a lady," he answered. "My natural politeness suggests that course; and I find it

generally makes things pleasant. In what particular way I have offended has escaped my memory, but that is a mere trifle, and quite unimportant. I was wrong, and you, oh, Deonys, as you ever are, were right."

"Ah, but you know very well," she said with much dignity—"you know perfectly well that I was thinking of Philippa. I could not answer you then, though I thought that you were a little cruel; but now I have known her for a whole week."

"I have heard of the rapid growth of a young lady's friendship for another young lady," he answered. "It has even been disrespectfully likened in my hearing to that of a mushroom after a September shower. That, of course, must have applied to friendships a few hours old—juvenile friendships, so to speak. So venerable an attachment as yours——"

"Don't be sarcastic," she interrupted, holding up one finger—"that is one of your faults—because I mean every word I say."

"I only meant to hint that any lingering hope of proving myself for once in the right has fled before so overwhelming a proof of your superior knowledge. You have known Miss Philippa for a week, and I don't for an instant question that you have got 'further ben,' as they say in the north, in these eight days, than

I have in as many years. That freemasonry you ladies practise is a profound secret to us."

Deonys was too well used to that light way of his, and understood too thoroughly how it was only skin-deep, as it were, to be at all offended by it.

"Yes," she said, "we girls understand each other very quickly; at least, I understand Philippa, for she is the first girl friend I ever had, and I wanted to tell you that every day I love her more."

"That is a usual symptom, and doesn't alarm me. You will go on loving this new friend, and she will go on loving you, till on both sides the fever has reached a climax. I won't venture to predict what will happen after that."

"You predict a relapse, or a chill, or some other ugly conclusion; but you will be wrong again, as you always are," she retorted, with her happy laugh. "I understand Philippa, and to understand her really—herself, you know, and not the ways she puts on—is to love her."

"Then I feel myself safe, for I haven't mastered the first steps yet. I haven't got beyond the 'ways' I suppose, for I don't pretend to understand Miss Philippa. The severity of the study always frightened me."

"I wish you would," she said pleadingly. "I mean, don't turn against her. You are kind



to her, and yet you don't trust her. But indeed you may. I know that her life hasn't been like mine : she has had no Ralph, and no padre to look after her and keep her in order, but she is nice. As for her ways, why, we all have our little ways. You have some very dreadful and growlsome ones yourself, as I am always telling you. Now, promise you will be kind to my friend—my very first girl friend."

"I don't believe she will do you much harm," he said, with a smile at her earnestness and her imperiousness. "If those little ways threaten to become alarming, I'll step in, I promise you, in my office of guardian."

"You will have surrendered to them long before that!" she answered gaily.

Now this week that had elapsed since the Henshaws' arrival had revealed to Di one or two other things besides that profound knowledge of Philippa's character, of which she made her little boast. It had convinced her by some mysterious process—call it womanly intuition, or what you will—that Ralph Malleeson's love for her new friend had been a quickly dying flame, which had soon burned itself out. There was to be no pain for him in their renewed intercourse. That pleased her. She did not wish him to suffer; yet while she was glad for his sake, she was the next moment full of

inward reproach against him ; for the old regard had regenerated on his part into a kind of light, good-natured distrust, that betrayed itself in every sentence he addressed to Philippa. He was kind and friendly, and yet it was as if he had weighed her and found her wanting, and scarcely cared to hide the discovery from her. Philippa appeared to notice nothing of all this ; but Deonys noticed it, and it vexed her. She was, like all young and enthusiastic people, a warm partisan. Philippa's cause was her cause. Hence this little bit of special pleading, while she and Mr. Malleson shared the twilight and the coolness of the September night.

“ And why,” said Malleson, after a meditative silence, while he watched her fingers twisting and turning the fragment of muslin stuff—“ why does Miss Philippa deprive herself so long of your society ? This is, let me see, the third night I have found you alone, and always pretending to be immensely busy over that strip of white stuff, that never gets on an inch further.”

“ Why, it's nearly done ! ” she said indignantly.

“ Oh, is it ? I'll swear the needle was in the very same spot two nights ago.”

She passed over this insinuation with dignity. She occupied herself with Philippa's defence.

“ People need not be always together, though

they care for each other," she said. "And, besides, I have no right to all Philippa's time. I am only her friend."

Just then there came from the apartments below the sound of Felix Chester's wholesome laughter. It broke in on their pause of silence like an enlightening voice.

"And my cousin Felix aspires to be something more?" he said quietly.

"She did not tell me." Deonys looked down at her work. "Even if it is so, I don't suppose she would be likely to tell me about it—so soon."

"There are some secrets that are patent to everybody," he answered carelessly. "I don't pretend to understand Miss Philippa, as I said already, but there are one or two points in her character that even I have mastered. No, Di, don't be afraid. I'm not going to make any unpleasant remarks after that snub I got a little while ago."

"But I don't think you are speaking very pleasantly now. If I were Philippa I wouldn't tell you, at any rate."

"You are an irreverent young person, Di, and have no proper respect for your guardian. Wait till she imparts the particulars of her latest conquest to us, and you shall see what excellent advice I'll give her."

"She won't like it."

"She won't take it, you mean. But I'll have the satisfaction of airing my wisdom all the same."

"Would it be good for her, if it were true? Would it please you?" she asked anxiously.

"Good for her! She asks if it would be good for her. And what about the unfortunate young man? Who is to be anxious on his behalf? I was Felix's mentor in the days of his youth. When the time for confession arrives it will fall to me to adopt his cause, I can tell you!"

"Oh, but they won't ask you and me," said Di, with a smile. "They will have each other. What will they care what we think?"

## CHAPTER VII.

"All I see in you is worthy love."

RALPH MALLESON had not ventured to show himself in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room since that little discovery touching his supposed heirship had been told her by Philippa. Perhaps he was waiting till the time for condolence should pass. The lady's lively pity, or livelier indignation—she was sure to be indignant, and to insist that she had been deceived—did not present itself to his imagination as an exhibition that was likely to amuse him. He preferred Di's naïve pleasure in his escape. After that one expression of her gladness she had said nothing more about the matter. It had indeed given her a side glimpse into Ralph Malleson's family life—that life about which he was so carelessly silent—but it left her without further curiosity on the point. There was a baronetcy to which he was the apparent heir while the

existence of his brother's boys was unknown; a baronet was to her a remote and indistinct being—a person set on a pinnacle like the Hon. Mr. Berry, the British Minister at the Embassy—a person to be a little afraid of. All this her dear old friend and her father's friend might have become; from this those welcome twins had delivered him. Since he had not grudged them their place, why should any one else mind?

This, or something like this represents the sum of Di's thoughts on the subject; Mrs. Henshaw's it need hardly be said, were rather more complex.

At first, as Ralph had predicted, she had shown much indignation. She had been deceived, and a want of openness (in others) was a fault for which this lady had no pity. She had harboured an imposter—a man who wormed himself into society under false pretences, who sailed on the stream of evening parties, and dinners, and at homes, under stolen colours. It now appeared that he had all along been suspected, that one eye had failed to be dazzled by all this show of honesty, one mind had been quick enough to perceive the essential commonness that lay behind this assumption of breeding.

Philippa, to whom this was said, and whose memory was inconveniently clear, burst out

laughing. Was it in human nature to help remembering the praises of Ralph's nose and his feet?

Mrs. Henshaw was highly offended.

"What are you laughing at?" she said. "If you think secretiveness is a thing to be treated as a jest——"

"I was only thinking, mamma, that you must have had a suspicion of this when you refused to ask Mr. Malleson to dine with us that time the Baird-Browns stayed with us. Of course, a millionaire like Mr. Baird-Brown must want more elbow space than others, one knows that; so there wasn't a corner for Mr. Malleson. What is the use of being rich if you can't crowd others out?"

"Philippa!"—she spoke with cold emphasis—"you may thank me as long as you live that I did not yield to your whim for inviting Mr. Malleson that time you mention. Who can tell what might have happened? It is a mother's duty, however irksome, to be foreseeing and cautious. You were a mere girl then, barely out of the nursery, and a girl's affections are easily ensnared."

"Not when that girl has been well trained," said Philippa, with some bitterness. "As for my youth and my pinafore days, they are little fictions which we have agreed to accept. When

was I a child, I wonder, or too young to balance claims and calculate chances? Don't let us drag a good man's name into our talk. Mr. Malleson was more keen-sighted than you suppose. He understood us."

"Ah, you are angry with me, because I thought it my duty, as a mother, to guide your girlish fancies," said Mrs. Henshaw, with pen-sive resignation. "Well, I will try to bear it. Perhaps, when you reflect on the life I have saved you from, you will do me justice. Bare justice is all I ask."

"I have yet to know from what I have been delivered," said Philippa proudly. "The lot you have planned for me doesn't seem to me so overwhelmingly good. Oh, mamma," she said, dropping into the old light tone which had yet a touch of melancholy in it, "if we could only have been foolish and blind and uncalculating like other mothers and daughters, the prize might have fallen to us, who knows, without all this striving!"

"You don't know from what you have been delivered!" cried Mrs. Henshaw, still grappling with the first sentence. "Child, are you so much in love with poverty? Do I need to tell you what it means?"

At another time Philippa would have laughed at the picture now drawn for her enlightenment:



turned gowns, one-button gloves, the smell of dinner pervading small airless rooms, washings conducted at home; the eating of one's fish and one's fruit with a steel knife, nay, the having no fish and no fruit to eat! These and many other items her mother gathered, and held up for her warning. From these she claimed to have rescued her by that timely coldness to an old friend.

But, for once, Philippa did not feel an inclination to laugh. This melancholy catalogue reminded her too urgently of the things she liked best to forget. Had not this unsightly underside of life stared her in the face all her days? She knew it very well in all its ugly details; what she knew less well was the certainty that she was henceforth to be delivered from it.

She presently left the room, and returned in a few moments with her hat on.

"I am going out with Di," she said, "to call on two old ladies." She spoke pleasantly; she had quite forgotten her little outburst of bitterness; she never allowed anything to make her uncomfortable for long. "You have a novel, I see. You will not miss me."

"I can amuse myself, I am glad to say," Mrs. Henshaw answered, as if the thought afforded her consolation. She still wore her grand air, and spoke frigidly. "I have always had

many resources. Every well regulated mind has resources." Then, with a sudden descent into the commonplace—"You might have put on your best hat, Philippa, if you are going to pay visits; but, if it is only old ladies you are going to see, it doesn't matter. Of course, *I* can't be expected to go. They ought to call on me."

"You are supposed to be resting after your journey. My appearance will be the signal for them all to appear."

"Three days after an arrival—that is the proper time; but so few people understand how to render a little attention gracefully. A fortnight! It is really quite a slight. I have lost all interest in seeing our English neighbours now."

"Then perhaps I had better hint to them not to come," said Philippa gravely, pausing at the door. "I've no doubt the old ladies know everybody, and will tell their friends. Old ladies generally do spread things."

"I beg you will do no such thing!" Mrs. Henshaw said, in some alarm, taking her daughter seriously. "However discourteously others may treat me I believe I know my duty. I do not expect to find here a society equal to that I left behind—for that I am prepared. It may be dull, it may be underbred, but I trust

I know what is due to my position. You may say, however, if you are asked—and do try to remember the ladylike habits I have striven to teach you—that, having quite recovered from the fatigues of my journey, I am about to attempt a little sight-seeing, under the guidance of our dear Mr. Chester. A fortnight is really long enough to stay at home. One must stand a little on one's dignity."

"Very well, mamma." Philippa showed a demure face through the half-closed door. "But perhaps I had better not say that to the dull ones or the underbred ones; then they would come when you are out, don't you see?"

Before there was time to grasp the meaning of this remark she was gone. Left alone, Mrs. Henshaw's mind went back to Mr. Malleson's defection; his almost wilful desertion of her ranks; for, of course, a plain Mr. Malleson, with no prospects whatever, was not entitled to much social consideration. But presently another element came into play, and her indignation gave place to a kind of lofty pity for his supreme disappointment (to have persuaded her that he was not disappointed would have been an impossible task). By dint of much pondering she had come to the conclusion that, in homely phrase, one reliable string to your bow is better than two on whose strength you cannot wholly

depend. Within the last few weeks certain things had happened that made it possible and even easy to dispense with Mr. Malleeson, except, of course, in the capacity of an acquaintance, who might at any moment prove useful.

At this juncture, oddly enough, she remembered the look that passed between him and Deonys on the day of her arrival—a look of friendly trust and understanding that had surprised her. On the whole, it was well that he had proved himself useless to serve as that second string. A conclusion thus, that would have pleased him well.

Are there indeed mothers who calculate and plot as this mother was plotting? daughters who—with whatever secret sense of shame—yet consent to be the subjects of this unholy scheming? or do they only exist between the boards of those novels we put on the top shelf of our library?

Philippa was meanwhile walking gaily at Di's side through a northern suburb of Madrid.

At the end of September you have Madrid at its best. About that time, or the beginning of October, you look for the coming of the little summer of St. Martin, a milder, more glowing, more tender guest than its elder brother, that burns the life out of all but dogs and Frenchmen, and sows the seeds of future

revolutions in the hot Spanish blood. Already as they walked the air was tolerably cool, and the sun not too penetrating to be warded off with umbrellas.

"And where are we going first?" Philippa questioned, as she looked about her with bright, inquiring glances—at the gay pink-tinted houses, and at the peasants, not less gay, who were crowding to the city to attend the fair of San Mateo.

"There are Miss Piper and Mrs. Gordon, you shall choose which to see first," Di answered.

"Then let it be the maiden lady by all means. You and I ought to have more in common with a Miss Piper than with a Mrs. Gordon. On the whole, Di, it is my conviction, arrived at after mature thought, that married ladies are a mistake. They never contribute anything to the talk, except their husbands and children. They might just as decently discourse about themselves."

"Not my Mrs. Gordon," said Di earnestly; "you will like her. Besides, Ralph says she knew you all in England long ago."

"Worse and worse. Married ladies are at all times hard to please—they are used to so much perfection in their husbands and children,—but a married lady who has known all about one as a baby and has registered one's youthful

indiscretions—no, Di! I must be braced for this visit by a little of Miss Piper's society. Miss Piper has never been married; and she didn't know me in my youth, did she?"

"Wait till you see Mrs. Gordon," said Di, smiling, "you will change your mind very quickly. As for Miss Piper, she is not young, and"—she hesitated—"she is my friend."

"Then I hope she will be mine, too," said Philippa quickly, for Di's face had lost its smile and was a little grave.

Their way now lay through wider streets climbing steeply upward. At the top of the hill there was a break between the tall houses; it was almost as if they stood apart on purpose to let one have a glimpse of the long, limitless plain stretching to the wide horizon like a sea.

Di instinctively paused an instant. That far-reaching grey monotony, sad but for the bending blue of the heavens above it, had a nameless charm for her. Philippa looked at it, but she looked at other things as well: at the long, tree-bordered road between the scattered houses; at the dun-coloured, mild-eyed oxen dragging heavy loads of wood, and stirring the powdery dust with their slow feet. The sheep-skins bound about the branching horns made her feel hot only to look at them; the creak of the heavy

wooden wheels grew irritating to her before Deonys had wearied of that wide expanse.

Philippa's glances strayed a little further. Over the way was a rustic wine-shop, with branch of withered green stuff depending from the lintel; at the door stood a clumsy cart filled with inflated pigskins, the muleteer was within the house proving in the most convincing of all fashions that his Val de Peñas needed no bush; among the long train of mules dire anarchy prevailed.

"One more, only one step more, number eight," Philippa said, "and the confusion is complete. Number eight has done it! That way of harnessing the mules is one of the things of Spain that wants mending, one of the very few things in this country of yours, Di, that falls short of perfection."

"Let us get on before the muleteer comes out, and the maledictions begin. *They* won't fall short of perfection, if he can help it," said Di, hurrying on.

They now paused before one of the blocks of houses which lined the road. It was rather a shabby tenement, taken as a whole. It had an air of having seen brighter days, and indeed it was almost overshadowed by a large hospital of red brick. They crossed the courtyard and climbed the stairs, climbed till they seemed

nearly to reach the roof. At every landing Philippa, who was dancing on in front, looked back inquiringly; but Di shook her head, and travelled soberly on.

But the tallest house that was ever built ends somewhere short of the sky. And at last Di stopped at a mean little door, and knocked softly. All this time the girl had been very grave.

"It is nice and airy up here," said Philippa, pausing to give some dainty little pats and touches to Di's hair and dress; "but if I were Miss Piper I would slide down on the banister."

Even this idea, comical as it was associated with the lady in question, only drew forth a smile. Deonys felt serious, and almost anxious. This visit to Miss Piper meant something more than a mere friendly call. It was a test which was to be secretly applied to Philippa.

There were some things about Miss Piper for smiling at which you might be pardoned. She was an old maid, and old maids all the world over have been the target for arrows of fine ridicule; but if Philippa had indulged in the mocking mood it might have gone hard with that contract of friendship the girls had signed and sealed.

The small English circle at Madrid was not in all probability less kindly or less charitable



than other social circles, yet it had its light jest now and again, at the expense of this solitary spinster, for whom Deonys had found room in her large tenderness. Just on this one point the girl had become almost morbid in her championship. Those small absurdities and eccentricities that stirred the easy laughter of others awoke her grave and loving pity. She had a way of touching on certain points in the history of this insignificant single woman that made you suddenly ashamed of your merri-ment.

So it was that Philippa's introduction was a much more serious affair than appeared on the surface; it was a means, the best Di knew, by which to judge of her new friend's sincerity. Ralph had hinted that there were certain things about Philippa that were "not nice;" it was now to be triumphantly proved that this was a mere masculine prejudice.

Miss Piper herself opened the door at the summons. She was a little woman, very faded, and dressed after a fashion quick to betray that her youth, so remote to others, was an illusion to which she still clung. Deonys never laughed at the scraps and tags of ribbons and laces, the soiled artificial flowers that decorated Miss Piper's grey hair, or the coquettish set of her scant flounces; but all the same she promised

herself secretly that, with Madame de Stael, she should learn the art of growing old gracefully.

"How are you?" she asked, stooping to kiss the withered cheek. "I have brought my friend to see you, as I promised. Philippa, this is Miss Piper."

"That was charming of you, my dear," said Miss Piper airily. "I am delighted to know you, Miss Henshaw. As I often tell Deonys, there are so few young people left now. When I first came here I had so many girl friends, but, dear me, they are all married now. So stupid of girls to marry; they grow old and dowdy at once."

"I quite agree with you," said Philippa, in her bright, quick way. "I was telling Di just now that I think married people are a mistake."

"*Quite* a mistake! So glad you agree with me. Di and I made up our minds long ago that nobody should entrap *us* into matrimony—didn't we, my dear? And now, here is another to join our league! We were really feeling quite deserted. To be sure there is Miss Barbara Gordon, but you wouldn't call Miss Barbara very sympathetic, would you, Deonys?"

"Not very, perhaps," said Di, hesitatingly.

"Quite an old maid, I should say."

In the far-off days of her youth, Miss

Piper had been comely; her conversational powers were never great, but she had had a pleasant laugh that went a great way. Now she was no longer comely, and the ripple of laughter, with its fantastic girlishness, went less far. Still it helped, as at this moment, to tide over pauses that might otherwise have been awkward.

They had followed her into the first of the small rooms of which her house consisted. A single glance at its details showed that she was exceedingly poor, but it was a decent, patient, self-respecting, almost a sprightly poverty—a poverty that did not exclude crochet anti-macassars and wool mats, sprinkled everywhere, to be in readiness for everything that, by the most liberal interpretation, could be supposed to require this protection. As Miss Piper's industry had been great and her ornaments were few, the mats were sometimes put to uses hardly counted legitimate by her lady friends, who would whisper among each other that each separate bit of china in Miss Piper's scantily furnished cupboard reposed on its own square of woolwork.

"I have this floor all to myself," she explained to Philippa. "It is a little high, perhaps, but wonderfully fresh and airy, and the climb—why, that is nothing. If one were

rheumatic, like poor Miss Barbara, it would be different."

"You have a nice view," said Philippa, standing on tiptoe to peep out of the high window. "Oh, are those the Guadarrama mountains I see there over the roofs?"

"Yes, yes," cried Miss Piper, nodding her head delightedly. "I call that my private and particular view. The downstairs people have none of it, not even the tip of one of those white peaks; the hospital shuts it all out. That is one advantage of being high up. Then it is so select. Nobody to quarrel with, as I often say."

"Do you live quite alone?"

Philippa turned from the window, and seated herself on a little stool at the older woman's feet. Her eyes were soft with a new expression as she looked up into the gentle, smiling face.

"There is my little maid, who comes for an hour every morning and night. She does the rough work; the lighter duties I undertake myself—the dusting of the ornaments, you know. I dare say you have noticed that a servant never can place a thing straight. But Juanita is a good girl," she hastened to add, "and quite a protection when I go out of an evening. I tell Deonys it is very unwise of her to go out even in the day time alone. Some one might speak

to her in the street. I could mention many cases; I have been addressed more than once myself. Spanish men are very wicked, I am afraid, and the way they stare is really most disconcerting."

"Di has me to go with now, and I won't let any one be rude to her. Sometimes, if you will let us, we will come for you, and we can protect each other. He would be a bold man who ventured to speak to us then," said Philippa, smiling.

"That would be charming. A little congenial society is a great pleasure. Juanita is hardly a companion. She is a good girl in her own way, but Deonys, my dear, I'm afraid—I'm afraid!"

Miss Piper ended her sentence with some mysterious movements of her head and hands.

"Not more lovers?" said Di, smiling. "I thought you had persuaded Pepe Davila to give up his claims."

"Pepe drew a bad number at the quinta, and that settled his affairs, poor fellow! I was so sorry for him, and really, when he came here to say good-bye, I felt myself quite giving way. And now—would you believe it? it is his brother!"

"Poor Pepe! he will hardly like that," said Di, who knew the history of all the Marias and Juanas, the Emilias and Amalias, who had in turn served this anxious mistress.

"I give her the best advice in my power. I talk to her almost every day. I say to her, take example by me. I am in no haste to marry, though it is possible—just possible there may have been one or two gentlemen—but what am I saying? Oh, about Juana; the girl actually laughs in my face, and says since she can't wait for Pepe she will take his brother! And of course she will marry, and lose all her youth and spirit."

"I am very sorry—about her leaving you, I mean," Di answered. "But if Pepe's brother and she have made up their minds, you must let us find some one else for you, some one who doesn't want a Pepe."

"Ah, my dear, if you can find her. But they all want a lover, even the ugly ones. I have spoken to so many of them," she turned to Philippa, "but not one would listen." Her face grew sad as she thought of the years she had preached this doctrine without securing a single disciple. "They go and marry, though I beg them to wait and enjoy their youth a little. They all go. It makes one feel lonely, and almost as if one's youth had gone too; and as if one were growing old when they bring their children to see one."

There fell a little silence on them after this. Philippa's eyes were very grave. Surely

it was not difficult to find a little tenderness for a weakness so human and so harmless? Di, looking at her friend, thought she had never seen any one so beautiful.

Then Miss Piper jumped up and said they must have some refreshment. A little ginger-wine, or if not that, then, at least, some sugar-water and a biscuit. Both girls were eager in combating this proposal. Di, who knew very accurately the state of the cupboard, drew the little spinster back to her seat with gentle force, while Philippa declared that wine and sugar-water were things she never touched, and as for tea, she thought that fashion of drinking it in the afternoon was a very stupid one.

"You might show Philippa your family portraits," Di suggested, by way of diverting her thoughts from hospitable designs.

"To be sure!" cried Miss Piper, the little shade of vexation giving place to a smile. "I am glad you reminded me of the miniatures, dear. Family heirlooms," she explained to Philippa. "I call them my credentials. I prefer a simple and retired life—indeed, prudence dictates it, so long as one is unmarried—but, of course, I can't expect the new people here to understand my circumstances, or to take me at my own valuation, so I show them my portraits; that makes everything satisfactory."

The likenesses Philippa had already noticed hanging on the wall ; they were the only relief to its bareness. A great deal of loving care had been expended on the frames, which were made of bright coloured-paper, leaves and grasses. They gave the effect of a miniature *Père-la-chaise*.

Miss Piper took them down tenderly, lightly blowing the invisible dust from them, and handed them to Philippa, with a little running commentary on each. There was a Mrs. Piper of a generation or two back, a stout old lady, with a towering head-dress and broad collar ; there were genteel daughters of the Piper family with thin waists and very high noses ; and gallant gentlemen in full-bottomed wigs and short waistcoats.

Philippa looked at them all very gravely. The girl was in her gentlest, most human mood. There was to her something inexpressibly sad in this company of slim, smiling ghosts. Yet the little spinster was saying, with that small laugh of hers, that she was never dull with all her family about her, and that, if she were minded to be giddy or imprudent like some of her young friends, how could she with so many watchful eyes upon her ?

Last of all, as being the most treasured possession, was produced a faded daguerreotype of



the Rev. Robert Piper, once upon a time chaplain to the Embassy at Madrid. The portrait revealed a hectic, narrow-chested young man, not unlike his sister in the kindly goodwill of a pair of innocent, wide-opened blue eyes.

"We couldn't afford a miniature then," the little lady said, looking with a sudden saddening of her face at the well-loved features, "so we had to be content with this poor substitute. Some day, when I make up my mind to marry, I shall have a large painting executed from this photograph. I mean to make that a little bargain, you know, before consenting. Robert was very handsome; he had the true Piper nose. And such an eloquent preacher; I always thought his fine talents were thrown away here. But you remember him, of course, Deonys?"

"No," said Di gently; "I don't remember him. Major Gibbs does," she added eagerly; "I have heard him say so."

Major Gibbs claimed to be the oldest English resident in the city, and there was the growth of forty years and more over the poor chaplain's modest grave in the Protestant cemetery.

"Ah, well, one forgets how time runs on," she answered with a sigh. "To be sure, it is a good while ago, and I have never been able to make up my mind to leave Madrid since then. Some day I must go and see all my old

friends in England again ; but it seemed cruel to leave Robert all alone, though that will sound very foolish and sentimental to you, I dare say, for what good can it do him, you will say ? ”

“ No,” said Philippa, who was addressed, “ I don’t think it sounds foolish at all.”

For the moment it seemed to her she could thoroughly understand and sympathize with this feeling of reluctance to sever oneself from the last link to vanished friendship—the mortal dust of one held dear. Only, Philippa had never known any one, unless it might be her father, to whose memory such devotion would be possible.

“ But you will come and see me sometimes with Deonys ? ” Miss Piper continued, cheerfully, “ and tell me about your gaieties in London. I used to go to a great many routs and dances myself once. I dare say I might be induced to enter society again if I were there ; but here one must be very prudent. One cannot be too careful.”

“ We will come often,” they assured her in one breath, as they rose to leave.

Philippa had an engagement which called her home, but to get away was not such an easy matter.

First, Miss Piper insisted on accompanying

them down a flight of steps; and they had to wait till she fluttered into the bedroom to fetch a shawl, which she secured about her curls, "in case any one should meet and speak to me on the way back," she explained. "I assure you, my dears, the way those Spaniards stare is really most disagreeable."

When the final parting was about to be made on the second landing, it seemed as if all the really important questions had been till then forgotten; and what with Miss Piper's timid peeps over the banister, her fears lest any one should come up, and her anxiety to impress on the girls the urgent need of prudence, the farewells bid fair to be prolonged.

"And how is my dear Mr. Malleson? To think that I should have omitted to ask for him all this time. That is what I call an excellent young man."

"He is very well," Deonys tried to say.

"And just as charming as ever," Philippa added, lightly.

"Ah, my dears, take care," came the gentle warning. "Do be prudent, and take time; don't be in haste to commit yourselves."

"We'll be ever so careful," said Philippa, kissing her hand. "Di will keep one eye on me, and I will dragon her like any Spanish dueña."

"To be sure he is a worthy young man," murmured Miss Piper; "and I always feel quite safe with him myself. Still young people are so foolish nowadays. You may tell him that I asked for him, Deonys."

"I'll be sure to tell him."

"And give my best respects to your dear papa."

"I won't forget."

"And do be prudent, and don't let any one speak to you," came the last anxious warning from above, as Miss Piper retraced her steps to the little room—a solitary, fantastic figure, living patient, peaceful days among old and dearly cherished memories and hopes scarcely less dear.

The two girls ran down the many flights of steps hand in hand. At the bottom Di paused, and, impulsively drawing Philippa's face down on a level with her own, she kissed the warm red lips.

"You are so beautiful," said this foolish Di; "and, my dear, I love you so."

The wide court was dimly lit and deserted, and there was no one to see.

Philippa was still grave, and her eyes were sombrely shadowed.

"To think that one may come to that," she said absently. "I wish I may be half as good."

But oh, Di, if you see me taking to a head-dress like that when I am sixty, I beseech you to burn it, or me, which ever you like."

Was it possible to help it? In spite of her youthful severity and her fine championship, Deonys burst into a merry peal.

"Why do you laugh?" said Philippa reproachfully. Her tone was melancholy, but her eyes had a suspicious twinkle in them. "If I had laughed, you would never have spoken to me again."

But Di's laughter rang out the more full and clear. Part of it was honest joy, for had not Philippa proved, to the confusion of every doubter, that she was "nice" through and through?

"Come," she said, when she had sobered a little, "we must go home; there is no time for Mrs. Gordon to-day."

"No," said Philippa, who was secretly relieved; "and it is just as well, for I'd very likely have disgraced myself, and lost your fine opinion. I never can behave long at a stretch. Here, Di, take my arm. No, the other one; I must leave this free for action in case any one presumes to look at you."

It was late. The sun had already set, and the pale daffodil of the western sky was fast fading before the swiftly advancing dusk. The

goats were straggling homewards; their bells made a pleasant tinkle as they strayed here and there across the sandy road.

When they reached the Puerta del Sol, the lamps were already lit, but they burned as yet with a pale, inefficient glow. On the balcony, that is reached from the first floor windows of the Hôtel de Paris, a young man was lounging. It was the hour Felix Chester usually devoted to a cigar and such philosophic study of human nature as was possible from his point of vantage. Among the many faces that passed under his scrutiny he did not fail to notice those of the two who were hurrying home with free, elastic step, very different from the indolent grace with which their Spanish sisters walked. Philippa's head was a little haughtily erect, her lips proudly set; she was acting dueña to perfection; but at some word from her companion she dimpled all over with mischievous smiles.

Felix smiled, too, out of sympathy. He was half inclined to swing himself over the balcony, and drop down on the pavement beside them; but he reflected that an athletic feat of that sort might be misunderstood by the populace sauntering beneath him. Besides, there was an excellent dinner awaiting him, which would suffer from his inattention, while Miss Philippa's

smiles could be enjoyed at any moment. It struck him to wonder why the young girl she was protecting so carefully was never present in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room, by which it will be seen, that, in spite of his psychological researches, he had made no profound study of that lady's character.

Could Philippa have enlightened him? She was parting at that moment from Di with many pretty endearments. There was no word of further meeting that evening. It was good-bye till to-morrow.

"Hásta mañana," cried Di, flying lightly up the dark staircase.

She, at least, needed no further enlightenment; she was well content with her friend.

## CHAPTER VIII.

*Oli.* "What manner of man?"

*Mal.* "Of very ill manner: he'll speak with you, will you or no."

"THIS," said Felix, "is what one might call the land of to-morrow. Mañana is a most useful word; I should print it in big capitals in the conversational guides. I knew a fellow who once ran all over Italy on the strength of two phrases written on his card. 'How much does it cost?' on one side, and 'I'll give you the half,' on the other. He made a noble collection of curios, and he wrote a book about his travels afterwards, and that book paid. He might have done Spain on a much smaller capital; I could sum up the necessary words on the fingers of one hand."

"Now, I should call it the land of yesterday," said Philippa. "See how we differ! There's a sort of great-grandmotherly appearance about everything that is rather comfortable and highly respectable. It is like living



among one's ancestors. The eyes of the past keep watch over you. I feel as virtuous under their gaze as Miss Piper surrounded by her miniatures."

"Well, past or future, it's all the same," said Felix. "Whatever it is, it isn't the country of the present. As far as one sees, there is no reason why anything should ever get done here. It is the paradise of loafers; the genus is getting rare elsewhere; I suppose because they all come here."

"That is why we came," said Philippa sedately. "It is so nice to feel that you don't need to be always 'moving on.' We flatter ourselves that England is the home of liberty; it is liberty with a halter round its neck—freedom to do as others do. Can you fancy yourself, for instance, basking in the sunshine seated half way up the steps of St. Paul's?"

"I can imagine the discomfort of the position," he answered, laughing.

"How the people who go to examine the bargains in the Churchyard would stare!" said Philippa meditatively. "Our chaste bonnet' at five and elevenpence wouldn't have a chance. Yet here we sit, with this gloomy old church behind us, and nobody so much as gives us a passing glance."

"There aren't many to look, are there?" Felix smiled as he surveyed the empty, wind-blown space in front of them; "I noticed two beggars and a dog since we came."

"Oh, you want to destroy my comparison; but all the same this is a public street, and the Atocha is the St. Paul's of Madrid. You are doing what you would not do in London."

"That's unanswerable. Whatever I might be doing, I may safely own that I shouldn't be making a public spectacle of myself on the steps of St. Paul's. I am modest. I hold back and allow others to distinguish themselves."

"I know. You like comfortable obscurity. You would be at your club; that would be pleasanter."

"I might if there was nothing better going. It's a good place to go when you feel bored or out of sorts. You can always pick up a grievance to justify your ill temper. Some fellow is sure to appropriate the paper you want, or the seat you have set your heart on."

"That explains the institution. How nice it must be to have to go in search of your grievances. We keep ours all ready at home. That is why we have no clubs, I suppose."

"Or because you have no irritation to justify."

"No," said Philippa, with her sudden smile; "we are all angels. It is a good thing ladies'

clubs don't succeed. Some hundreds of angels, each more amiable than the other, how tiresome that would be!"

"If you had clubs," said Felix meditatively, "what would become of us when we had worked off some of our noble anger, and wanted a little gentle soothing? What would become of us, if you were hidden behind grim, unscalable walls?"

"I see," said Philippa demurely, "our use in life would be gone."

"At four o'clock, in London, I am always visited with melancholy. You wouldn't think it, would you? but it is true all the same. It's such an aggravating, crawling, creeping hour. There's nothing to look forward to except dinner, and that is three hours off. And it's too soon for the charm to begin. You wouldn't take pity on a fellow, then."

"At four o'clock? Perhaps not."

"I wonder how you get rid of it? You might tell me," said Felix, who was lazily inclined, and not ill pleased to be amused by this slightest of slight talk.

"I decline to commit myself," she answered, shaking her head. "I might be turning one of my gowns, or trimming one of the churchyard bargains, unless I were showing it off in somebody's carriage. At five o'clock you would

find me beautifully dressed, and smiling behind the tea-cups."

"You don't do that sort of thing?" He looked at her with frank astonishment.

"Which sort of thing? Make dresses or tea?" she asked demurely. "You have seen me make tea, I think; as for the rest, I am sorry to contradict you, but it is quite certain that I am my own milliner and dressmaker."

"I should never have guessed it." He looked at her with grave assurance.

"What an equivocal compliment!" she cried, arching her delicate eyebrows. "Don't you know that the art of making a toilet is lost in England, dead and buried ever so many fathoms deep? And when I attempt to revive it for myself, you tell me I may pass muster in a crowd!"

"I didn't mean that," said Felix seriously. "I thought you were an idler, like me, and I find you are one of the working people. Now you will turn round and lecture me, as Ralph does."

"No; I leave you to him."

"Well, he is enough, I assure you. Granted that I am idle. I admit it, but I can give you a thousand reasons to justify it. Why should everybody toil? Work is the curse of our generation; it makes life hideous. We are

losing the very vestige of an idea how to play. We are born old men; we have no boyhood."

"There is a little remnant left—while you live."

"Oh, you are laughing at me, are you? Well, am I not of more use than all your workers if I keep alive the old tradition? When people look at me, they may remember there was such a thing as youth once, and 'dreamful ease.' Of course, I am speaking of England."

"I thought you found the afternoons so long?" said Philippa innocently.

"That is because I can find nobody to play with. Now, here it is different; here everybody plays, and it is you workers who are in a melancholy minority. It would be quite sinful not to make use of one's opportunities here. Ralph can't see it."

"Not even with such a brilliant example before him?"

"And I can't make it out," said Felix, in a puzzled voice, not heeding the interruption. "For a fellow who has lived the half of his life here to go on grinding as he does is a most remarkable thing. Why, everything about you helps on your inclination to idleness!" he cried, prodding with his stick at some moss that had crept between the worn stones. "Sitting here

in the sun that useful word 'to-morrow' has a delightful charm about it. Don't you feel it in the very air? There is no ghost of neglected duty to haunt you; we left that spectre behind us on the other side of the Channel. Just think how little there is you really require to do. Is there any one you want to see, or don't want to see? All that can wait till to-morrow. Here one is delivered from the plague of a daily post, because the letters don't arrive—till to-morrow; so you don't need to bother about answering them. There are no newspapers except Spanish ones, and, as they concoct all the foreign news at home, it would be a mere waste of time and temper to read them. There is absolutely no reason why you should do anything but enjoy yourself; and if it doesn't come within your plan of enjoyment to poke about that musty old church behind us, why, that, too, can be put aside till this slowfooted 'mañana' arrives."

"So you may as well sit down again," he added, for she had risen.

"All very well for you," she answered, dimpling all over with mischievous smiles; "you who have paced and measured the Atocha, and made notes about every dusty banner and worn tombstone in that little book you carry. I know you. You have detected Baedeker

stumbling. I dare say you've written to the editor, or publisher, or whoever it is, though you pretend to be so lazy."

The little assumption of cynicism, which he loved to put on, modelling himself on his cousin whom he had always admired, was a mere farce, which she was quick enough to detect very early in their acquaintance. It sat on him the more oddly that he was, for his years, very young, and that he was, in reality, ready to extend an eager hospitality to each new sensation.

"Come, you may as well confess."

He turned round and looked up at her, and they both laughed.

"I thought it would amuse me," he said, "but it didn't. There is nothing to be seen that you haven't seen a hundred times. Take my word for it."

"I always take my own word for things. It is perverse, I know, and may sound rude, but it is me. I can't help it."

"You will repent it. It will bore you."

"No," she said softly. "I can't afford to be bored, like you. Not yet, I must enjoy things while I can. By-and-by I may not be able to amuse myself."

"Don't lose this chance, then. Much better stay here. You will find them very gloomy. I am sure old Ralph hates it, in spite of his conscience."

"I dare say he does, and mamma too ; but then, her sense of duty, the duty of verifying Murray, carries her on heroically."

"You have no duty to perform."

"Oh yes, I have," she answered, turning away. "I am going to rescue Di. If any one should be tired, it is Di. She has seen it all a hundred times. No one thinks of her."

"Shall I ask her to come out here beside us?"

"No," she said quickly. "I am going to her." But she turned once more and asked suddenly, without looking at him, "Why did you tell us that story about him—your cousin. It was a mistake."

"What story?"

"You know. About his having succeeded to the title."

"How was I to know that Roderick had married? He choose to keep that piece of information to himself. He was always a queer beggar."

"I think it was Mr. Malleson who was 'queer' to make a mystery of it."

"He considered it his own affair, I suppose," said Felix philosophically. "You don't know old Ralph if you think he talks about everything."

"You take his disappointment very coolly, I think."



"Well"—he looked at her for the first time a little curiously—"where would be the use of taking it warmly? Why should I care, if he doesn't? A title wouldn't improve him."

She smiled.

"He wouldn't grace it," she said.

"If there had been responsibilities connected with it, it would have been different. He is not the man to shirk any duty, however much he hated it: but there is no land, and very little money. And as for a mere handle to his name, I think, for my part, he is better without it."

"You think a great deal of him."

"I have good reason," he answered composedly.

"I, too, like him best as he is—much best."

She was addressing the distant horizon, and she spoke gravely, and with almost unnecessary earnestness.

"I dare say you will find it difficult to believe me, but it is true."

"Why should I find it difficult to believe you?"

She stood quite still for a moment, while he asked this question; then she glanced down at him and laughed. "I am going to Di," she said, and, without any further explanation, she went.

Of course he meant to follow her, but he did not do so at once.

She had a great attraction for him, this strange, beautiful girl, sometimes so startlingly frank, sometimes so reticent and reserved; but just at this moment a cigar was a stronger compelling force than the inclination to go with her. A cigar and the golden, mellow sunlight falling on the worn steps, turning the tufts of moss in the crevices into a border of rare colour; the infinite blue of the sky above him; the sadness of the gloomy church hidden behind him; and that "to-morrow," that was to bring again the work and the business of life, so far distant as to be only a vague shadow that threw into greater relief the light about him—who could ask or desire more? Not young Felix, certainly, into whose Arcady as yet no Phyllis had wandered to draw him by her spells from all that made the hour so fair.

The little plan of going a sight-seeing had been carried out, but not quite as Mrs. Henshaw intended. Miss Piper and Miss Barbara Gordon had called before this arrangement took effect. Their sudden alacrity was almost as displeasing as their former dilatoriness, for it is undeniable that Mrs. Henshaw considered the visit ill-timed, and found both ladies dull. Miss Piper, in her timid way, had touched upon those ancestors on whom her claims to consideration rested, and had been pronounced "to give her-

self airs." Miss Barbara, on the other hand, had been dogmatic, and even, perhaps, dictatorial.

"It was 'You ought to do this,' and 'You must do that,' just as if she were my school-mistress," the lady explained, plaintively expressing her sufferings.

"She reminds me so much of Miss Black, at Brighton. I am sure she must have kept a school, Philippa. I can't be mistaken in the type. Miss Black was an old maid, too. They are all alike."

When Philippa hinted that Miss Piper was a spinster also, and that nobody would suspect her of keeping a school, there had come that retort about her giving herself ridiculous airs.

"As if any one bearing the absurd name of Piper could be of good family! We might just as well have gone out as you proposed, child" (Philippa did not remember to have made the suggestion), "for I am sure, if the society here has nothing more attractive to offer, it was wasted time staying at home. And just when I do take a little run out for my health, of course Major Gibbs calls in my absence. Quite my usual luck. If you had been at home to show him some little attention, now—you might have offered him some wine; gentlemen are always thirsty—but, of course, you were out,

too. I really must keep you with me during calling hours."

"Very well, mamma," Philippa had made answer; "we must start a regular day at home, then we should be certain to secure Major Gibbs, and we could have the wine and the pretty little attentions all ready. To be sure, Miss Piper and Miss Barbara might come, too; but then tea would do for them."

Then, seeing that nothing more was to be hoped for from society, the duty, which every travelling Briton loves to fulfil, was undertaken.

Here, again, things fell out not quite according to the original plan, for when Felix was requested to act as guide, it being known that he had already accomplished the part his country expected of him, that young man lazily suggested that his cousin Malleson was the proper person to lead the van.

Mr. Malleson, consenting gracefully, had added, in an easy way, that Deonys Ouvry was more "up" in such matters than he, who had confined his studies to the political aspects of the country. Thus it came about that the party was increased from three to five; there was nothing for it but to accept the inevitable.

When Di, escorted gaily by Philippa, came downstairs, she found Mrs. Henshaw very gracious.

"Here," said Philippa, "is the captive. I deliver her over to you, mamma."

"I am sure we are very much obliged to you, my dear," said Mrs. Henshaw condescendingly. "Mr. Malleson tells me you are quite a clever guide, and I prize instruction above all things. I am willing to be instructed by anybody." She looked round her, as if claiming applause for this sentiment. "As I tell my daughter often, true intelligence is always humble."

"Indeed, I know almost nothing," said Di, looking rather alarmed, and casting reproachful glances at Ralph, who was negligently examining the pictures. "I am not a good guide."

"Never mind, sweet one," said Philippa, laying her hands on the other's shoulders; "humility isn't critical. You can heighten all the tragedies, and jumble up the dates without fear of detection. It's a good while since mamma was at Brighton; and, as for me, I've never been at school at all."

"You make me regret I did not send you," said Mrs. Henshaw severely, "when you talk in that unbecoming way."

"Ah, but think how much more disagreeable I might have been if I had been as learned as this child," she answered, with a merry glance at Malleson. "Not that you are disagreeable, Di, or that any amount of wisdom could make

you that. It is only where I am concerned that ignorance is bliss."

"I think, Miss Ouvry, you had better come with me," said the older lady suavely, sweeping out of the room and inviting Di to follow; "I shall protect you from the sallies of my foolish Philippa. I dare say you have noticed that it is a little whim of hers to disparage herself; but, I assure you, it is quite remarkable how clever she is. All her masters united in saying so; and, as I gave her the most expensive masters that were to be had in London and Paris, of course you will agree with me that their judgment was final."

Di felt a little puzzled by this flow of words. Was it because the masters were expensive that Philippa was clever, or did they demand larger remuneration on account of her superior talent? It sounded like a rhyme that might go on for ever.

She was beginning to say, in her grave, shy way, how pretty Philippa was, and how bright, when Felix Chester joined them. He was rather late, but he had a frank air of ignoring that fact, and presented himself as if punctuality was one of his virtues. It somehow came about presently that he fell behind with Philippa, while the others walked on in front. In this order they arrived at the church, and in this order, as we have seen, they remained.

If Malleson had weakly hoped by enlarging the party to shelter himself from a too minute examination into his affairs, he soon found himself mistaken. While he wandered about the vast old church, taking, to do him justice, the chief burden of explanation on his own shoulders, it seemed as if the dim traditions that linger about the Chapel Royal had an odd way of doubling back on the present. Kings and queens had plighted troth before the great altar, and had made vows which were sometimes held in faithful remembrance and sometimes forgotten; yet it appeared as if it were Malleson himself, or his grandfather, his uncle, or his cousin who had been treacherous to some binding promise, and against whom the old walls, had they speech, would have cried out. What had he done, or what had some one else done, to bring down this lady's large displeasure?

Between every item of information, which he gave with a desperate attempt to keep to the subject, came some such irrelevant question as :

"Do you know who the woman was? Very likely some low person of whom he was ashamed."

"I assure you she was a very haughty princess, and it was quite a brilliant affair. Spain is the place for pomps and vanities and a royal marriage——"

"Oh, of course; I was not speaking of Ferdinand. I was thinking of your cousin, and how he came to tell us such a strange story. It really seems very odd that he should not have known."

"Felix was not present. It's a good while ago, you see; and when you come to think of it, he could hardly be present."

"Oh, you tiresome man!" cried Mrs. Henshaw, veiling her irritation by an assumption of playfulness. "Of course, I was referring to the babies!"

"Ah, the babies; yes, we can go and see the font. But they christen the royal children generally in the chapel of the palace. Did you notice our flag up there among the dusty banners? I'm always ashamed to see our national colours in such a position."

"I see I am not to be allowed to approach the subject," she said, tapping him airily with her fan.

"Take care," said Malleson gravely; "there is a step in front of you. Come this way."

"You have a proud spirit; you prefer to bear your wrongs in silence. That has always been my way. A dignified silence is what I have aimed at under all my trials. Now, with poor Mr. Henshaw it was so different. He had no fortitude. I have really seen him break down quite like a child."



Malleson did not evince the surprise that was expected of him on hearing this. It would have astonished him to learn that the late Mr. Henshaw had preserved any remnant of endurance after the first year of married life.

"So this is the font. Dear me, quite a plain affair. But, you know, Mr. Malleson, though you are so heroic, you can't prevent my pitying you. You have my sincere pity."

He felt that he needed it, though not on the grounds she supposed. He even found himself envying the battered effigy of a carved knight, lying in a profound peace, undisturbed by any strife of tongues. The gloom of the dreary place fell upon him, as he continued his task, with a melancholy that could not be shaken off. He was at no time a very patient man, and it cannot be said that he performed his duties gracefully. Di had been weary of it all long before this, but she was always hindered in her little attempts to escape by a well-timed question or remark.

"We really can't do without you, my dear. Two judgments are better than one, you know; and I love to get a full account of everything. Ah, there is Philippa, she will not like this; darkness always affects her. She is like me—so sensitive. Philippa, my love, did you want me?"

She came in like a ray of light in her white

dress; but her only reply was to draw Deonys away, putting an arm round her waist.

"Are you tired, my pretty one—tired of telling the musty old stories about this musty old place? Come and sit down here; there is none to forbid. I don't want you to tell me anything; I'll take it all in faith. There can't be anything very pleasant to hear about so dark a place."

"I'm a little tired," Di confessed.

She sat down on a lower step; and, taking off her hat, laid her head on Philippa's lap.

"And I don't wonder," said Philippa, softly stroking back the ripples of brown hair. "What with the ghostliness and the grimness, and with my excellent mamma's—no, I will be good; lie still, Di."

For Deonys had made a little protesting movement at the last words.

"How melancholy it is! Mr. Chester was right," said Philippa, looking about her. "One feels as if all the sadness of life might take shelter here."

"Is life so sad, then?"

"I don't know. I've a suspicion that it is, but I hide it away somewhere. I never let it look me in the face. It will be time enough to find out when one can't help it. But if I wanted to cry, I should come here."

"I can't fancy you crying, Philippa."

"Can't you? That sounds a little severe, do you know? But it is true that I don't indulge much in tears. I never found out the use of them, unless to make you ugly: a red tip to your nose, and a red rim to your eyes, and a cold in your head. You may be forgiven for not inflicting that kind of penance on yourself."

"I don't know how it is," said Di, staring out into the dimness in front of her, "but I think I could cry very easily. It seems as if it would be much easier for me to be unhappy than for you. I can imagine so many things that would make one sad. Only I shouldn't come here."

"Where would you go, then, to do your wailing, my poor, melancholy Di?"

"Oh, I don't know. Somewhere where there was nobody; not even dead people."

"Except me. I, who am such a butterfly, such a creature of sunshine and happiness and easy, untroubled days—I should come and comfort you."

"But you mightn't be there, or——"

"Or, I might be the cause of your unhappiness? Now, you weren't going to say a horrid thing like that, were you?"

"No; how could you make me unhappy?" said Di incredulously. She did not reflect that

it is from our dearest friendships that most of our sorrows take their birth. Sorrow was to her an alien thing—a dim something that was nobody's fault, that came from some far-off shore, outside the circle of one's joys.

"Do you know we are talking nonsense," she said; "at least I am. I who have been so happy always."

"It is all the fault of the place. And so the kings and queens are married here! Poor things! it is enough to chill their fancy for each other—if they happen to have any—at the outset. Can't you imagine those two stone gentlemen under the banners getting up and imploring the foolish couple to think better of it?"

"Better of being afraid of the Atocha? That would be good advice, though it might frighten them still more if it came to them in that way," Di said, laughing.

"No, you quick child; better of getting married."

"Why should they?"

"Because they would most probably repent it."

"You know better, Philippa. If people care for each other it must be very good to marry."

"Ah, but that is a big 'if'! Many marriages are made with the caring left out. It is best

to start on that understanding, for sooner or later the caring ceases."

"Philippa, why do you talk like that?"

"Why? I am giving you this benefit of my observations in the course of my journey through life."

"But you wouldn't cease to care——" Deonys put up her hand to touch the beautiful curving lips as if she would have silenced them. She was uneasy at the turn their talk had taken.

"No, my dear; because I should begin the other way I mentioned. I should start without the caring."

"I don't believe anything so horrid of you."

"They wouldn't tie the knot for an insignificant Protestant here, would they?" she went on mischievously, only half in earnest in her attempt at cynicism. "Because the gloom would be well in keeping with the circumstances of my nuptials. It's a case of the highest bidder; and he, I have noticed, is not generally a very attractive person, to put it nicely. You see, Di, there are possibilities of unhappiness even in my life."

"Philippa, don't! If you knew how I hate to hear you talk like that. It's not nice!"

"Don't, don't, don't!' you limit me dreadfully in subjects to-day, my little Di. Well

then, I won't, and if ever I do—isn't that Irish?—you shall act the part of stone knight, I promise you. Here is my pledge.”

She stooped and softly kissed the brow from which she had brushed the brown hair.

Di sat up and made a girdle of her two hands encircling the other's neck. She was half unconscious of the earnestness of her look, for she was thinking of the young man sitting outside on the sunny steps—the careless favourite of fortune, whom surely it would not be so very difficult to love.

“Well,” said Philippa, dimpling all over, “does my face play me false? I assure you I was quite solemn over that promise.”

“Come out, come out into the light!” said Di, letting her arms fall suddenly, and rising up. “The chill and the darkness have made us both stupid.”

“I don't own to the stupidity.” Philippa shook her head. “I was fearfully prophetic.”

“Hush, hush! I won't listen to another word. Look! Your mamma and Ralph have finished at last, and there—is not that Mr. Chester?”

“Oh, yes; that is Mr. Chester. He was wise enough to stay outside; which does not say much for our attractions, my dear.”

“He knew you would come out again.”

“And not the property of the highest bidder

yet," said Philippa lightly. "Look! our stone knight hasn't moved so much as an eyelid."

When they were all assembled on the steps, it appeared that Mrs. Henshaw's appetite for sight-seeing was not yet satisfied. A new accession of gloom fell upon Malleson. They went on much in the same order as that in which they came, except that Philippa kept Di's arm in a firm clasp, and would not let her go. As usual, she led the talk, and it pleased her to come back to the subject of dress. She had shaken off her prophetic forebodings with considerable ease.

"You don't see any of the ladies' journals in your club, do you?" she asked, turning to Felix.

"Well, no," he answered, with a smile.

"Well, you would see some things that would surprise you. There are the people who ask questions: whether you ought to reject a young man because he is two inches shorter than you, or because he has red hair; how much soap a family of four and a baby ought to use in a year; how many cards at a time you ought to leave on the rector's wife, and that kind of thing. These are the people who have a thirst for information, and they are mysterious enough; but the women I want to know about are the women who are anxious to change clothes with each other."

"To change clothes with each other!" echoed Di and Felix in a breath.

Philippa nodded.

"Yes, dresses and jackets and bonnets—everything. Suppose I get tired of this gown"—she glanced down at it; it was as neat and simple as a dress could be—"all I've to do is to write a little paragraph about it, and send it to one of those obliging magazines. I put its best points forward, of course. I don't say that I made it myself, you know, or that you trod on it, Di, and tore it at the waist. I mention, in an easy way, that it is made of stuff that royalty patronizes; and that I am only parting with it because I have such a very extensive wardrobe that I really never get a chance to wear it. So I brush it and fold it up neatly; and next day, sure enough, I find that somebody else has got tired of *her* gown, and wants mine in exchange. Think," she said plaintively, "of wearing a dress that another woman had walked in, and sat in, and gone to church in, and laughed in, and cried over. What queer stories that dress might tell if it could speak."

"What a ghostly idea!" said Di.

"There are people, hundreds of them, who have a passion for that kind of barter," said Philippa, solemnly, "and I want to know who they are."



"It might do very well if people were all one size," said Di; "but when a big woman gets a little woman's costume, what then?"

"It's like a fellow I know," said Felix, laughing, "who is always changing his page. The livery isn't a perquisite, but it does wear out sometimes. The last candidate for the place was a little fellow, but as he seemed smart enough, and likely to stay, the new clothes were made for him. But he didn't stay—nobody does stay there. My friend told me he had advertized everywhere for a lad to fit the livery; but he thought they had all grown tall on purpose to aggravate him. The latest owner of the suit reminded me strongly of Smike, in his liberal display of wrist and ankle."

It is to be supposed, though their talk was not very profound, that this trio enjoyed themselves more than the couple who walked sedately in front. They visited certain other churches, all of which are excellently described in the guide book to which Mrs. Henshaw made constant reference, requesting Deonys to read the information aloud, so that, as she said, one might hear every side of the question. Philippa and her companion were allowed a considerable amount of liberty, and generally enjoyed it with their backs turned to the work of art under examination; but the lady's thirst for informa-

tion permitted neither of the others to join them. They had wandered at last to the Museo Nacional. Malleson glanced up at the sky with the air of an imprisoned captive; in the slow gathering dusk he saw a faint promise of release.

"Unless she is inspired with the frightful idea of looking at things by gaslight," he said to himself; "if it comes to that, I'll bolt."

The chief treasure, guarded by the walls of the Museo, is well known to every lover of Murillo. The saintly Thuringian queen, sweetest impersonation of tender and sympathizing womanhood, bent on deeds of gentlest charity, for ever glorifies the little museum. Malleson forgot, for the moment, his depression while looking at the well known group; he failed to hear the aimless remarks that had tortured his ear all the afternoon. Something beyond the beauty of the picture touched him. She was almost his ideal, —this queenly woman with the pathetic intensity of her desire for helpfulness shining out of her eyes—almost, and yet not altogether. For was not his ideal mistress here in the flesh, breathing the same air with him, looking at him with friendly, confiding glances, soothing him by her mere presence? Yet he thought it was only the painter's spell that was on him, tranquilizing him; and she, standing a little

apart before the sweet peace of the pictured scene, never knew how near love had come to her.

In a little while, a touch on her arm startled her. She looked round. Felix Chester stood behind her. He stepped back hastily, and his look seemed to beg her to follow. There were one or two visitors in the room whom, by his movement, he dexterously placed between her and Mrs. Henshaw.

"Miss Ouvry, pardon me," he said, "but Miss Henshaw sent me to you."

"Is she ill?" said Di, in alarm.

"No; but she has unexpectedly met—an acquaintance, I suppose, I must call him," he glanced distrustfully towards the other end of the room. "I think she wants to go home."

"An acquaintance!" said Di bewildered. "She knows no one here."

Yet while she spoke she was following him as he went, still keeping that line of strangers between her and Philippa's mother.

"I think she wishes to go home quietly with you, if you don't mind," he said again.

They had now crossed the room which, at its further end, was deserted except by two people. Di hardly knew her friend. Philippa looked queenly, but not with the royal grace and loving charity of the pictured princess at whom

they had been looking; every line of her face and figure expressed haughty scorn—her head was poised defiantly, her lips which Di had hardly seen without a smile, were proudly curved, her beautiful eyes were lit with anger. Not far from her, standing quietly, yet wearing an air of being master of the position, was the apparent object of all this sudden passion. Di only bestowed one look on him. In that glance she saw a man of middle age. His face was pale, and his expression coldly passive; he had bushy red whiskers, which he held gathered about his chin in one hand; his eyes, which were light in colour, were fixed on Philippa.

All this, though it takes time to tell, occupied but a moment. Before Philippa had moved, Di went up to her, and laid her hand softly on her sleeve.

“Come, dear,” she said, “come home.”

The girl's tense expression relaxed a little at the touch. Taking Di's outstretched hand and drawing it within her arm, she went away silently, without so much as a gesture of farewell. Felix watched the two girls until, unseen by Mrs. Henshaw, they had safely left the room. Then he turned on his heel and sauntered up to the group standing before the picture.

“To tell her, or not to tell her?” he questioned himself. “Aye or no, gentlemen? The

eyes have it; no they haven't. Our red-whiskered friend shall be left to get out of the scrape unaided. To judge by appearances another such reception would be salutary."

But a like reception was not to be accorded him. Felix's eyebrows were raised in genuine surprise, when, a moment later, Mrs. Henshaw's wandering glances fell upon the stranger.

"Dear me, Miss Ouvry has deserted us," she was exclaiming, in a dissatisfied tone. "How easily young people tire nowadays! I thought my daughter was with you, Mr. Chester," she broke off, seeing that it was Felix, and not his cousin who stood near her.

"She was with me till a moment ago," Felix began, seeing he was "in for it," but having said this, he said no more. He was delivered from further explanation; the explanation was there behind him, in the shape of a pale-faced man with red whiskers.

He was not specially quick at reading faces, but he could not fail to perceive the instantaneous look of dislike or dismay—it might have been either—that crossed Mrs. Henshaw's face, when she became aware of the man's presence. It was so subtle and evanescent, however, that he almost fancied himself mistaken, when, on turning away with the true instinct of a gentleman, unwilling to surprise a

secret not meant for his eyes, he heard Mrs. Henshaw greeting the new-comer courteously, if not cordially.

He went up to his cousin.

"I say, Ralph," he said, "I think we may take ourselves off now. We aren't wanted any longer."

"You aren't," said Malleson, still in the depths of gloom.

"Nor you, either, old fellow. You may look round without being caught up for it."

The first use Ralph made of this permission was to search the room for Deonys.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"She, meaning Miss Ouvry, has gone home with Miss Henshaw."

"Was she sick of it all? I am not surprised," he answered, relapsing into melancholy.

"She, meaning Miss Henshaw, *was* surprised, I should say," said Felix, with laughing eyes, "and not grateful for the surprise either. The cause you will discover for yourself, if you look behind you."

He did as he was bid, and examined the stranger with evident disfavour.

"Who is the man?" he asked at last. His tone expressed a new kind of disgust.

"There you know as much as I do," Felix answered; "and I am not pining for greater

light. You see we are not wanted, and may as well go. Come and dine with me. They give you a very decent dinner at the Paris; and you shall smoke a better cigar than any you can buy here, though it is the home of the weed."

Malleson suffered himself to be led away without any resistance. Once on the way to the Puerta del Sol, he stopped abruptly in the middle of the pavement.

"I don't want to have her mixed up with people like that," he said.

Felix looked at him, but he made no reply.

## CHAPTER IX

“O most delicate fiend!  
Who is't can read a woman?”

PHILIPPA was still silent when she and her companion reached the street. She walked quickly, perhaps to preclude the possibility of Di's asking her any questions. But Di was also silent. She glanced at Philippa once or twice; her face was darkly moody, and every movement expressed surprised and haughty anger. Whoever the stranger might be, he had the power to move her strangely. Suddenly she slackened her pace, and, with one of the quick changes of mood to which Di was beginning to grow used, she said—

“My poor Di, I am using you shamefully; you are quite out of breath.”

“No, no, Philippa; go as fast as you like. You want to get home, don't you?”

“He won't dare to follow me,” she said proudly; “but if he should, I won't give him



the satisfaction of thinking I am running away from him. Let us go slower."

Di was silent; she did not know what to say, but she glanced behind her rather fearfully. She was relieved to see no pale, passive face gleaming out of the gathering dusk.

"After all, what good can it do?" Philippa said presently, with a new change to despondency. "Mamma will be sure to give him our address. He will walk home with her, very likely, to make sure she has mentioned the right one. He is capable of every meanness."

"Let us get home fast," Di urged, again with the fear of a stealthy step behind her; "and you can come up to our rooms. No one will trouble you there."

She felt a growing dislike to the stranger; and she was bewildered above all by the mysterious relations in which he and Philippa seemed to stand towards each other. What did it all mean? If he were simply a person she did not want to know, why this strong display of feeling?

Philippa said nothing to enlighten her. She was brooding silently till they had reached their own door; but when they ran upstairs, and Di would have drawn her further, she resisted.

"No, I can't come," she said. "I couldn't stay with you always; and he would wait, if it were a year, till I came down. Come with me instead; don't leave me just yet."

Di followed her reluctantly. Philippa went straight to her own room; she took off her outer dress and put it away, then she uncoiled her long hair and let it fall about her shoulders. There was an air of determination in all her actions that was new to her friend. Her lips were compressed, and her expression defiant.

"What are you doing?" Di asked surprised. Could she be intending to make a toilet for the benefit of the stranger?

"I am going to bed. Do you understand, Di? I am ill; you hear me. I am ill."

"It would be better to say openly you don't want to see this—person," said honest Di. "Nobody can make you against your will."

"Nobody shall make me, that is very certain."

"Then don't let him think he can force you to do things that aren't true."

"There is no danger of *his* mistaking," said Philippa disdainfully. "He knows very well that I loathe the sight of him; but it is the only way to escape him, and to gain a little time. Besides, Di, I am not making a false excuse. Just feel how my brow burns. What a

nice cool hand it is," she said, as Di's soft touch fell on her hot forehead.

She turned in her chair, and looked up into the other's face.

"To think that a wretch like that has it in his power to spoil everything!" she said, with an impatient sigh. "I thought I had seen the last of him, and just here, where I was so happy, he comes to take away my peace."

There was silence for a moment or two. Di did not know what to say.

"What do you think of me *now*?" Philippa demanded suddenly.

"I don't know; I don't understand," she answered in a troubled voice.

"Of course you don't understand. You could never have done it yourself. You would need to have been brought up as I was, to understand anything about it."

"I don't know what you have done," said Di, gathering courage; "but I am sure, whatever it is, you might undo it. There is nothing to take away our peace except wrong things that we have not put behind us." Her voice trembled a little. "You know I don't know how to say things," she said, bending her head till her cheek touched Philippa's. "But oh, Philippa, don't do anything that isn't true; that can only make matters worse."

"I wish I had had you always," said Philippa, touched by the tremulous little speech; "there might have been a chance for me then. Why weren't you my little sister? But no, I should not have liked that fate for you; and you would not have liked mamma for a mother."

This was undeniable, but it was also unanswerable.

"I suppose I ought to give up having you for a friend," she went on, her voice hardening a little. "I told you I should disappoint you."

"There are two to that bargain," said Di more lightly. "You can't prevent me from being your friend, even if you give me up."

"You would be horrified, if I told you everything."

"I am not so easily horrified," said Di, with the confidence of innocence. "I suppose that man is—one of your lovers?"

"He is one of my lovers," Philippa answered bitterly.

"Well, he doesn't look very nice." Di spoke as cheerfully as she could. "And if you don't like him, why can't you tell him so?"

"Oh, Di," said Philippa, unable to resist a laugh, "what an innocent child you are! Listen! you shan't make rash vows without knowing more about me."

"No, don't tell me," said Di shrinkingly.

"I must. Here is the short and the long of it. I've put myself into that man's power." The confession was made with the abruptness of shame.

Di involuntarily moved back a step. She remembered the look of possession on the stranger's face. Was this the clue to it?

"You may well shudder. Can you imagine a more melancholy position for any one who isn't the heroine of a novel? I am not the heroine of a novel, and there is no chance of everything coming straight for me at the end of the third volume."

"I don't know how it could become possible," Di answered, trying to show as little as might be how much she disliked the whole subject; "but don't tell me anything you would rather I didn't know. I can be your friend now, from this time, without going back on what is past."

"But I can't put the past behind me in that easy way," cried Philippa. "I thought I had done it, and see how I've succeeded! I've got to face it, and the future too; and, I can tell you, it's like passing from one ledge of purgatory to another—from the ice to the fire."

"Can the father help you, or Ralph?" Di said hesitatingly. "I am sure they would if they could. Won't you speak to either of them?"

"No, no, no!" cried Philippa, "not for the world. Not Mr. Malleson, of all people! Nobody can help me, unless you know of some good fairy who would give me a fortune."

"A fortune! Is it money?"

"It's everything." She spoke impatiently. "At any rate, I must manage alone. I'll fight with my own weapons, and succeed if I can, if not—— But there, I'm not going to think of that possibility. If you love me, Di, will you call Blake? I must secure one good meal, for I'm going to be an interesting invalid after this. I shall have the dear old woman's sympathy, that is certain. She hates him as much as I do. And, do you know, little one, in spite of the state of my health and temper, I'm dreadfully hungry."

"I wish you wouldn't pretend to be ill; you are looking perfectly well," said Di, pausing at the foot of the bed, and examining Philippa's face, once more mischievous with smiles.

"And you, my dear, are looking as doleful as if you were sorry for it."

"I hate mysteries," said Di, with some energy.

"Well, as a rule, I don't. I've been brought up on Machiavellian lines, you see; but just at present I do hate to have to resort to my bed, for we were having such nice times. I shall

believe now in presentiments. That man must have been lurking somewhere in the church, to make it so cold and gloomy. And you, my dear, who knows how soon you may be called on to play that *rôle* of stone knight!"

"I never shall."

"What! you would leave me unwarned to my fate! Come here," she said, suddenly softening. "Here, let me put my arms round you—so. Don't look so grave and so sad; I'm not worth it. You must let me laugh, or else I shall cry, and that would do no good. Listen, Di, for the sake of your dear little self, I'll take what you would call the honest way; but, oh, you have no idea what a coward I am, and to what a pitch I'll have to screw my courage before I can begin!"

"I knew you would do what is right," Di said simply, stooping to kiss her.

And, with this assurance to comfort her, she went slowly upstairs. She took a more sorrowful heart with her than she had ever yet known in her short life. The first glimpse of something that is less than the best in one's chosen friend—who does not know the sharp pain and sting of it? Is not all the world thenceforward a little the darker?

Later in life, when one has outgrown illusions with other happy things of childhood, one learns,

by more or less sad experience, that friendship makes many demands. It is paid for, perhaps, at a price of patience, of forbearance, of fidelity that trusts and loves on in spite of a sharpened vision of faults and failings. But in youth there is no counting of the cost, no fear of loss or lessening, no limit to the unquestioning, undoubting, happy faith in the nobility of one's first friend.

There were many things that Di felt might have been better in her own life (though to others it seemed a blameless record enough)—that she would have done differently, if she had had the power to do them over again; but this sensitiveness as to her own shortcomings had never troubled her on behalf of those about her. Hers was emphatically and before all things a loyal nature. She could not—there are women who can—pass on the vows made to the dead lover of yesterday to the living lover of to-day; make you her confidant at one hour and me the next, and deliver over the cheap and worthless pretence of affection to the first new-comer who cares to claim it. As little could she be faithless to friendship; with her to love once was to love on, whether wisely or not. Already as she sat with the grey shadow of the night, looking in phantom-wise at the window—sat in sorrowful idleness, a little less happily sure of



everything than she had been three hours before, her heart was rising up to make excuses for Philippa, to plead for her, to reinstate her on the old throne—if it might be, to establish her in that high place for ever. Love made loyalty easy.

On the other side of the Puerta, there were two who were at this moment also somewhat deeply engaged in the study of Philippa's affairs. During the meal to which Felix had invited his cousin they had talked of other matters. The dinner was excellent, and Ralph was not insensible to its mollifying effects; he had thrown off his gloom, and was an attentive enough listener to Felix's anecdotes. For a young man, who posed as one of the bored and indifferent school, Felix had a wonderful relish for all that concerned his set. Ralph was used to his outpourings, and lent a half-amused interest as he described whimsically, and not without good-nature all the light and flying talk of the past London season—the marriage of this old friend, the failure of that; the things people had done or not done, the things they were supposed to be about to do. It was the voice of society that spoke, making this young fellow its mouth-piece; but it reached Ralph Malleson without a shadow of its old authority. Once he, too, had found it necessary to be ac-

quainted with all that went on in the little world of London life, as young Felix found it now, but that was long ago. His horizon had widened or narrowed—as one may look at the matter—since then, and the echo of the old days woke no answering chord.

“What a monstrous day it has been,” he said presently, when there was a pause in the flow of story and reminiscence, yawning and leaning back in his chair. “You won’t get me to go sight-seeing in a hurry again—not with the mother, at least.”

“I think she’s very good fun,” said Master Felix, laughing; “she amuses me.”

“Does she, indeed! I wonder you deny yourself so much of her company, then.”

“I get a good deal of it, as a rule; but it was your turn to-day.”

“She patronized Murillo,” said Ralph gloomily; “she patted him on the back.”

“Well, she was only following Goldsmith’s advice, ‘Praise the works of Perugino, but say he might have done better if he had taken more pains.’”

“What did you bring them here for?” Ralph asked, after a pause, still clinging to a remnant of his grumbling.

“It was they who brought me, I think.”

“You had better take care.”

"I'll look out when I see danger ahead," Felix answered, looking frankly at his friend.

They had turned from the table, and seated themselves at the window; the cigars which had been promised were produced, and each was puffing meditatively.

"Shall I light up," Felix asked, "or do you prefer this dim illumination—it's just possible to fill your glass without spoiling this fine cover?" He pushed the decanter towards his guest.

"This, by all means; we get a benefit from the Puerta, and can see without being seen."

"We can hear, too, under the same happy conditions, it would seem," said Felix.

The room they occupied was divided from another on the same floor by a folding-door, from behind which there now came a sound of voices—that of the landlord, very polite, but apparently not encouraging; that of an Englishman, cold, clear, and high-pitched.

"I wish to engage this room and the bedroom next it. You understand me? This room and the next."

"Like the rest of his race, this Briton imagines that every one who can't speak his own tongue fluently must necessarily be deaf, as well as hopelessly dull," said Malleson carelessly.

"It is our friend of the red whiskers. It might make one wish to be deaf to hear much of *him*."

"How do you know?"

"I've heard him before," said Felix significantly.

The landlord's tones were now heard once more, deprecating, but firm.

"What's he saying?" Felix asked.

"He says the rooms are already taken."

"Then I hope to goodness the right owner will turn up, and deliver me from this fellow's neighbourhood."

"I mean to have the rooms. I will pay for them; I don't care what they cost. You may tell your señor so," came the deliberate voice, again quenching this hope.

"What a charming specimen of our countrymen!" said Felix, elevating his brows. "It doesn't surprise me that Miss Henshaw showed no urgent desire for his society."

"How did he come on the scene?" Ralph asked.

"He came on the scene just in time to spoil a good story. It's my belief he waited till I had come to the thrilling moment, and then cut in on purpose to annoy me. But he did more than that; he surprised me."

"Truly a wonderful feat."

"Oh, well, you know," said Felix, laughing; "a man with red whiskers isn't such an uncommon spectacle that one need be astonished at it; it was the fellow's abominable coolness that did it. Well, as I was saying, I was telling Miss Henshaw about Brex. You don't remember Brex?"

"No," said Malleson, "I don't remember Brex. I don't suppose it matters profoundly whether I remember Brex or not."

"Not at all; only he was worth knowing. We were up in the same year, and we did some rather neat things together. I was telling her about the great row at Bradley's supper."

"A nice story for a young lady."

"It's a capital story—a beautiful story; but I won't bother you with it just now."

"All right," said Ralph, "I dare say it will keep," for Felix's tone was doubtful; it was evidently an exercise of self-denial to wrench himself from the memory of that adventure of which Brex was the hero.

"It's worth telling a good story to Miss Henshaw," he went on between his puffs; "she is such a splendid listener. I like a girl to look interested when one talks to her."

"Perhaps your neighbour does, too."

Ralph smiled to himself. It amused him to see how Felix, having the ball in his hands,

played with it, with what a zest he tossed it about, how unwilling he was to let it go.

"I don't know what he may like; I know what I should like to give him. I shall advise him to take a few lessons in manners before he presumes to address a lady. Just when I reach the critical moment in my story, our friend ruthlessly destroys the whole beautiful structure with a stroke of his fat hand. Yes, a fat hand in a very tight glove comes between me and Miss Henshaw, and a voice—you heard it just now, only you can add a shade or two of impertinence if you like—claims her as an old acquaintance. He had the coolness to say he was glad to see she was enjoying herself so much, and added something about a promise which he had taken care not to forget. Oh, very fine courtly manners!"

"Then he is an old friend?"

"Acquaintance, I should say. There was not much friendliness in Miss Henshaw's face. The red-whiskered one took it passively enough; but I imagine he must privately have felt rather bad under the look she gave him."

"What is he like? I hardly saw him," said Malleson wonderingly, searching his memory.

"I shouldn't call him handsome," said Felix.

"To be frank, I should call him ugly. Not

that I blame him for that; it is the privilege of our sex. I blame him only for abusing it."

"And then?" said Malleson moodily.

"And then I was about to remark to our friend that we could dispense with his company without breaking our hearts, but Miss Henshaw stopped me. She begged me to go for Miss Ouvry, and I went for Miss Ouvry. They left the room together."

"I don't half like it," said Ralph, knocking the ash off his cigar. "I don't like it at all. You saw how the mother received him? Well, it is no business of ours, but I forboded annoyance when they came here. We'll be brought into this, you will see; that is to say, you will, and I'll have to pull you out again."

"Very likely; it has happened before. You describe our respective parts quite correctly."

"So you have made up your mind, have you?"

"I didn't know I had," said Felix meekly; "but if you say so it must be true."

Ralph took one or two turns up and down. Then he paused and put his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Felix, lad," he said, with more tenderness than he often cared to show, "you must take care of yourself in that quarter."

"Dear old mentor, I'll take care, never fear," said Felix, lightly.

"She is very pretty and very attractive."

"Very."

"But you see the sort of people she is mixed up with. I don't know whose fault it is, but there has been something radically bad in her training. I never liked the mother, but I don't give her credit for anything worse than silliness. It is Philippa's misfortune, poor girl! that she has not had a better guide. If this had happened to one's sister, now, supposing one had a sister——"

"Exactly," said Felix. "I propose to regard Miss Henshaw in the light of a sister, so far, at least, as our red-whiskered friend is concerned."

"But she isn't your sister."

"Who was it suggested the relationship?"

"Well, if it was I, I spoke for myself. You are a boy; you are not to be trusted to make such an experiment."

"I think she would like me best." Felix's eyes twinkled.

"Modest, as usual."

"I am more frivolous; less prudent. There is nothing about me to alarm her."

"And there is about me? Well, at any rate, you may wait till she asks you to become her champion. I fancy she will prefer to arrange this affair herself, unless——"

"Unless?" said Felix quietly.



"Unless there is something more between you than you have told me."

Felix laughed.

"I have not told you much, I think."

"Well, begin now. As a rule, you are not troubled with too much reserve."

"Do I bore you? One must have some one to talk to, you know; and you were always such an excellent listener. I will say that for you, old Ralph, you never worry a fellow with interruptions."

"I am listening now."

"Oh, about the 'something more'? Well, I don't like to go against your superior wisdom; you may be right."

"Come," said Ralph, "if that is all, there isn't much danger."

"Danger!" cried Felix in mock amazement; "and this from the man who has told me a thousand times that love is to be the making of me!"

"Aimer, c'est le grand chose,  
Qu 'importe la mai——"

"Stop, you impertinent boy! none of your cynical French poetry here. Love, yes; but what do you know about love? You haven't mastered the alphabet; it's too high a thing for you yet. You know nothing about it."

"I will take lessons from you, my mentor."

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"Ah," said Ralph, pacing the room, "not from me. It will come some day, I suppose; and then there will be hope for you. In the mean time, I must let you take your chance, and amuse yourself with the imitation. You always took everything pretty hot when you were a child, and I had the looking after you to do—measles, and all the rest of it. But you got over those youthful maladies quickly; you will get over this, too."

"But, in the first place, there is the infection," said Felix, "and I feel no bad symptoms. I only said you might be right—in deference to your wisdom; but, O Philosopher! you may be wrong—for once. I'll examine myself, if you like, and report."

"Mind I say nothing against her," said Malleson hastily. "There is a great deal that is very charming about her. She has the making of a fine woman in her if she were in good hands. We have no business to discuss her."

"Exactly," said Felix gravely. "She is a lady for whom I have the greatest respect. She is my very kind friend. At this moment my imagination refuses to go further."

"Well, well, don't give it too much rein," said Malleson smiling, as he rose to go. "You boys, if you would only learn of older people,

but you won't, I suppose. Don't do anything rash. Do you hear me?"

"I will be discretion's self," said Felix. "I will even promise not to take undue advantage of our friend's tempting nearness. As a proof of my prudence, you see, I take this key and turn it—so."

"Let me put it in my pocket, and I'll have faith in your prudence."

"I regret to refuse you, but, not being my property, I can't do that; but to satisfy you, I'll put it in my own."

Malleson lit a cigar and went out. As he crossed the lobby he saw luggage being carried into the room adjoining the one he had left—the luggage of an Englishman. The man of the red whiskers had evidently carried his point. Were there other points he meant to carry in the same determined fashion?

He went across the square slowly, seeing nothing of the crowd that still sauntered over the pavements and flitted in and out of the gaily lit café. He was thinking a little of Felix and a great deal of Deonys. He did not wish the boy to fall in love with Philippa; and yet it would be a marvel if he escaped. He had himself at one time felt something of her power, and he knew it to be great. Yet he was used to the spectacle of Felix in love, and

he foresaw no greater danger than before in this new fancy. He must take his chance. He could dismiss Felix thus lightly from his thoughts, because the most urgent of them were given to Di. Here, indeed, he was quick enough to fear danger. The boy could take care of himself, but he could not bear that any shadow, however faint, of what was less than open and honourable and pure should fall upon her youth and her innocence. He would shield her if he could, even if to do it he must be cruel. He glanced up at her window, lit and curtained now. He did not know of the sad little vigil she had been keeping all alone an hour or two ago, or he might have been tempted, late though it was, to go and comfort her. Well, at least to let her feel that he was there, to fill up her dull moments, to be her friend when others might seem to fail her.

What folly was there not in his thoughts—what folly! Was this the man who had been so wise—so paternal in his advice to Felix? Yet, as he turned away from her lighted window he said, gently enough—

“God bless you, my good little girl!”

## CHAPTER X.

"This is not love ; but love's first flush, in youth  
Most common. . . .  
And you yourself will smile at your own self,  
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life  
To one more fitly yours."

FOR one or two days after this nothing more was seen of the stranger whose sudden appearance had caused Philippa so much mental disturbance.

But, if invisible, he was not inaudible. Felix took a whimsical interest in listening to his movements ; to his orders, given in that high, level voice, that it was impossible to ignore. He made it his business to ascertain how often and at what times this neighbour of his became one of the little family party across the square. Having nothing else that he cared to do, he found the following up of this little tragedy, or comedy, whichever it was, amusing enough. All his observations were, sooner or later, imparted to Malleson, who found less opportunity or less inclination for such investigations. He

had always told everything to his cousin, who listened for the most part with grim indulgence, but at this time he showed less than his usual patience.

He was pretty certain to be visited by Felix every day, for the sight-seeing had come to an abrupt conclusion, and that young man had a large capital of superfluous leisure to draw on.

"The plot thickens," he said one night. "Our friend's interviews grow prolonged. Two hours and a quarter at a stretch might satisfy a moderate man; but our friend isn't moderate; he is not satisfied."

"How can you know all this, you absurd boy?" Malleson looked up with a growl from his writing.

"I know it to my cost," said Felix tragically. "The peace and tranquillity I prize before all things are measured out to me by the hour—the sixty odd seconds my neighbour spends in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room—can you wonder that I hoard them? Let us hope he enjoys himself as much as I do; at any rate, he spares me his raptures; on that point I acquit him."

"I should suppose he was hardly likely to share his happiness, even with you," said Ralph sarcastically.

"No," said Felix. "You are right, as usual."

He reserves me as the recipient of his woes; he shares his dissatisfaction with me in the most liberal and impartial fashion; he even takes peculiar pains to emphasize it, in case that slim partition should put me to a disadvantage."

"Felix," said Malleeson, throwing down his pen, "when are you going to begin to do anything? I don't speak of your allowing me to do anything."

"My dear fellow," said Felix with fine gravity, "I consider I am doing a great deal."

"A great deal of idle folly."

"That's as you like to take it, my mentor. I should call it hard work."

"This is none of your business," said Malleeson, pushing aside his papers, and leaning back in his chair.

"I consider it very much my business. I'm not for a moment allowed to forget the share our friend proposes I should take in his affairs. Now, to-day he gave me to understand that he felt on rather better terms with the world, and that pleased me, naturally, because I had the ordering of the lunch that soothed his ruffled feelings."

"You!"

"Yes, I. Why not? It is no new thing, is it, to discover that the road to a man's good nature lies through his appetite?"

"I don't see what concern you have with his food."

"Just this. Mrs. Henshaw, as I dare say you know, gets her daily supplies from the hotel. When she came she was kind enough to trust me with the ordering of the matter, and the keeping of the people up to the mark—no such easy business, I can tell you. Well, it amuses me to experiment on my partner. Once I put him through a course of native dishes, with a liberal flavour of garlic, but, by Jove! I won't try that in a hurry again!"

"You punish others as well, I should say."

"No, I think not. Women have no discrimination; and besides, they pick like birds. To-day I managed to suit his fancy better; but I don't mean to tickle his palate every day, I can tell you!"

"Do you mean to say he takes his meals there every day?" said Malleson, betrayed into momentary curiosity.

"One or other of them, every day. It isn't difficult to find out at which of them he means to honour Mrs. Henshaw with his company, and to arrange accordingly."

"All this is quite unworthy of you," said Malleson, rising and beginning to pace the bare, untidy room.



"My dear old mentor, the end justifies the means."

"What end?"

"You, who are behind the scenes, and dipped in ink, as it were, must know that it is a fixed and unalterable statute that every travelling Briton shall write a book for the enlightenment of his fellow Britons. I must obey this law of the Medes and Persians; I, too, must write my book."

"That's all stuff!"

"Now, I shouldn't have thought you would have taken it that way—you, a reviewer and criticiser of the mass of literature we are compelled to add to our country's stores—but one can never tell."

"Felix," said Malleson impatiently, plunging his hands in his pockets, "do, my dear fellow, be serious for a moment. It is all very well to amuse yourself, but there is such a thing as knowing when to stop."

"If you could impress that on my partner," murmured Felix.

"As I said before, all this is none of your business, and I see no good that can come of this whim of yours for following up the man, whoever he may be. Much better let it alone. In fact, I don't like it."

"I do," Felix again said softly to himself.

"And what is more, she won't like it either."

"Oh yes, she will."

Felix planted his two elbows on the table and looked at his cousin steadily.

"Look here," he said, "you'll admit that I know more about women than you do. I've studied them."

Ralph did his best not to laugh.

"Pray, what conclusion have you arrived at?" he asked.

"They require some one to look after them. They think they can stand alone and manage their own affairs, but they can't; they want one of us to help them."

"And you propose to manage Miss Henshaw's affairs for her?"

"I'm here if she wants me," he answered modestly; "and I think she will want me."

"From what I know of her I think she is very well able to take care of herself," Malleson said with a touch of contempt. "You will share the usual fate of meddlers."

"The man is a brute," said Felix calmly, ignoring this prophecy. "I quite understand how it is. She has been led into giving him a promise, to which he is mean enough to hold her, and she doesn't see her way out of it. Girls have a magnificent standard of honour ;

they would rather be miserable than break their word."

Ralph looked at him, but he said nothing. Did he really believe that Philippa Henshaw was endowed with this fine sensitiveness, this alertness of conscience, that she would embrace misery rather than fall short of the truth? As he looked at the frank, open young face, his own softened. If the boy believed it, he was not the one to disturb his faith. Distrust would come soon enough.

"I've got to go South next week," he said. "You may as well come with me. I don't want you, you know, but you will be out of mischief. The weather is good enough yet, and I promise you more amusement than you will get out of this affair."

"Can't." Felix shook his head. "Greatly honoured, profoundly sorry, and all the rest of it. But think what an opportunity I should miss; my public would never forgive me for losing so fine a chance of describing the Briton abroad. To hit him off well might make a man's reputation. Anything else to oblige, but this is really impossible."

"I haven't asked anything else of you," said Ralph, fuming with vexation. "I don't know why I bother myself with you at all."

"I'm sure I don't know either," Felix an-

swered, with more feeling than he cared to show, "except that you always were tremendously good to me, from the days when you used to lecture me on my incorrigible behaviour and wind up with a handsome tip. I was a horrid little beast in those days. I suppose you don't mind my saying now that I liked the tip best?"

"A hint that I may as well shut up. Give me a light, and let us talk of something else. This pet subject of yours leaves a bad taste in one's mouth."

"Agreed. There," said Felix, taking a whiff, "that disposes of our friend. Now, since you are in such a virtuous mood, will you take a look at these letters, and give me the benefit of your ripe experience? I find the postman is an institution one can't hope to escape, even here."

"Hope to escape! Boy, you are not to be trusted to manage your own affairs."

"Exactly what I think. I am handing them over to you."

"You ought to be poor—like me; then, perhaps, you might do something," said Ralph grimly.

"Ah! then I should work tremendously—like you," Felix retorted with laughing eyes. "Since you are so in love with labour aren't

you obliged to me for filling up your odd moments?"

"Here, hand them over, I'd be glad enough to find something in them that compelled your return home, young Felix; but there seems no chance of anything so good."

"No chance at all; my valuable presence is not required, as you will see for yourself. I'll take a look at the night while you digest the papers."

He went out and down the long stair to the narrow street in which Malleson lived. It was dark, the lamps were few and their light uncertain, but a pace or two took him to a broad and bright thoroughfare; one of the many arteries that lead to the great heart of the city.

Felix sauntered on slowly, his head well up, his bearing easy and careless; a handsome young fellow, well content with himself, and not without a robust interest in all that went on about him. He had already forgotten the business which he had slipped so easily from his own shoulders on to those of his cousin, and this out of no special desire to escape his obligations. It was an old habit to lean on Malleson—a habit which the other had not specially discouraged, for there was, after all, something lovable about the lad. He was not more selfish or less thoughtful than other young men; he

was capable of emotions more vivid and passionate than this mere making the best out of what befell him, which had satisfied him hitherto. But he was incomplete, undeveloped, a mere chrysalis unsummoned as yet to soar. That he could do much the friends who cared enough about him to think the matter out, were well assured; that he had done so little harm, seeing him to be rich and his own master, was surely to his credit.

These, be it understood, were not his own reflections about himself. Introspection is seldom honest enough to be of much avail, and he had besides "a native incapacity to moralize;" they were rather those of his cousin left behind to do his thinking for him. Felix's imagination had gone back quite naturally to his neighbour. He had a fine curiosity about him and his motives, rendered the more acute by his strong liking for Philippa. It need hardly be told that his feet involuntarily led him to the street that ran under her windows. He had not seen her since their sudden parting in the museum; it was but a day or two ago, but time refuses now and then to be measured by hours. It was an age, he told himself, and naturally enough, this too, was scored against the stranger, whose account was swelling.

He had barely reached the entrance to her

house when two figures stepped forth from it together and in talk with each other. He paused in surprise, for the lamplight revealed the faces of Mr. Ouvry and his, as yet, nameless neighbour. They presented a contrast: Mr. Ouvry was at any time a man to be looked at twice; he walked with an air of bland dignity, a serene consciousness of possessing good parts and an unimpeachable character; of being a person whom it was well worth your while to know. His companion, on the other hand, was short and squat, with shoulders too broad for his height, and features chiefly remarkable for all absence of comeliness. He moved like a man who had been too much in a hurry all his life to have time to cultivate any graces. People instinctively turned out of his way as he brushed past with little ceremony.

"Commercial," said Felix, sauntering slowly behind and making his observations. "Cotton or tallow, or possibly beer."

It must not be supposed that he despised trade; he had a great respect for it in the abstract, he only objected to it in the person of this stranger. He was occupied with a great wonder—"What can tallow or beer and diletantism and do-nothing-ism have in common?" He kept them in sight till they had crossed the Puerta del Sol and entered the café, but he did

not follow them further. Malleson's warnings were less needed than he supposed; young Felix had the instincts of a gentleman, and knew where to draw the line.

As he turned to retrace his steps along the Preciados, he entertained a half-formed purpose of running up the well-known stair. It was not too late to make a call, and the coast was now clear. The attractions of the café Fornos might be safely counted on to detain his rival for an hour at least—time enough to see Philippa and assure himself that their old friendliness remained undisturbed, in spite of their embarrassing parting.

He was turning in lazily, so as not even to himself to seem too impatient to put this plan into execution, but he had hardly taken a step or two, when he was again arrested, by the sound of voices, English voices, one sharp, the other pleading.

"Things have come to a pretty pass if that's what you call the new manners," said the first speaker angrily. "'Not at home'!—when I saw her with my own eyes through the crack of the door, all her length on the sofa! I wonder what my mother would have said if any Gordon of us all had refused to see the poorest body that was civil enough to inquire for our health? Why couldn't she have said she was indisposed



for company? There would have been some honesty, at least, in that."

"Oh, but it would have sounded rude; she would not like to hurt our feelings, and she could not know that we had brought our caps and meant to stay to tea," said Miss Piper, half-fearful at her own boldness while she spoke.

"Rude! Do you mean to tell me you put soft speaking before the truth?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Miss Barbara," said the little spinster with tremulous eagerness; "as a clergyman's sister and daughter, I hope I love the truth. But I think—I believe—oh, I never could explain things, but the words mean something else, I have been told——"

"Something else!" said Miss Barbara with fine scorn. "'Not at home,' means out of the house, unless the English tongue has lost its sense since I learned it. You'll be telling me next it was some other woman I saw lying on the sofa——"

"Oh, Miss Barbara, do you see that shadow!" cried Miss Piper, fear emboldening her to interrupt her companion, "there in the corner? Look, it is moving!"

"Well, why shouldn't it move?" said Miss Barbara a little contemptuously. "What is there to be afraid of in a man? You've seen one before, I suppose."

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"And this one is a friend," said Felix, coming into the circle of light. "Miss Piper, forgive me for alarming you, but, as Miss Barbara says, I really am quite harmless. Miss Gordon, let me take that basket from you. I'll take most tremendous care of it, I promise you."

But Miss Barbara declined this offer.

"I'm glad you are not too fine to be seen with a parcel," she said, "but I can't give you mine, for I've got my mother's China shawl pinned up in it, and I never trust it to any hands but my own. Here is Miss Piper with plenty to carry. She'll be glad of your help."

But the more timid lady could not be induced to relinquish even one of the many little packages with which she was laden, though their number kept her in constant fear of losing one. She was eager in her thanks, but she kept Miss Barbara's gaunt person between her and Felix, of whose airy ways she was secretly mistrustful.

"You were going up there?" said Miss Barbara, who had not moved on.

"Yes," he answered, "I had thought of going, but now, if you will allow me, I'll walk home with you instead."

"There is no call for you to come with us."

"Such a protection—a gentleman—the dark road," murmured Miss Piper.

"I've yet to see the man, or ghost either, that would frighten me," Miss Barbara went on, ignoring the interruption; "but, if you care to come, we'll be glad of your company. Only it's like enough they would be 'at home' to you."

"I won't give them the option, since they were ungracious enough to decline your society," he answered lightly. "If they let me in it would be because I'm not important enough to be shut out. They are accustomed to me; I'm like a bit of the furniture, to be used or not used, as it happens."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Miss Barbara gravely. "I hope you haven't fallen into their ways."

"Not into the way of being anything but charmed when my friends are good enough to look me up," he answered gaily; "but, unfortunately, you see, Miss Barbara, I'm a lonely and forlorn bachelor, without a house to ask you to, else, if you had honoured me by coming to tea—— By the way, there's the café. I believe it is quite the thing for ladies to go to it here. Now, if you and Miss Piper could be persuaded——"

"I can get my tea at home," said Miss Barbara, grim, but good-humoured, "and Miss Piper is to take hers with me," she added in

reply to a timidly warning touch on her arm. "The café is no place for old grey heads like ours, and you'll just come with us yourself. I won't say but what it's safer for you to keep on the outside of that door, too," she added, glancing doubtfully at the radiance that the Café Imperial generously shared with the square.

"At this moment," said Felix gallantly, "it pleases me best to be where I am—except for that matter of the tea. That really distresses me."

"If you never have more to trouble you than that, you'll be well off," said Miss Barbara, shaking her head. "Keep your strong words till you need them."

"Deonys pressed us to stay," said Miss Piper, who thought this way of meeting the young man's solicitude rather rude, and who was anxious to show that they were not without resources; "she is always so friendly and companionable."

"Deonys knows what is due to her elders, and she behaves very prettily and nicely to her mother's old friends. I must say that for her." Miss Barbara was stern in her discouragement of that little fiction of equality in years and feelings that it pleased her gentle companion to have faith in. "But the visit was not meant

for her. I'm not over fond of being seen in my neighbour's house at all hours, but when a person says to you, 'Come up some night and take your tea,' who is to guess that the words mean as good as nothing, and that you'll find the door shut in your face?"

"I should interpret them as you do," said Felix, "and resent that shut door frightfully."

"Well, well, I'm an old woman," said Miss Barbara, softening a little now that she had proclaimed her grievance, "and you are not so young, either, Miss Piper; but we have a great deal to learn yet, it seems. I must say the old fashions please me best, and to my thinking, there was more real politeness in my mother's rule than in this fine turning up and down of honest words till you shake all the meaning out of them. There was no keeping of folks hanging on your pleasure then, while you made up your mind whether you were to be in or out. You had to run the minute you were called, without so much as a touch to your hair or your collar, or a peep at the glass. If you were untidy, you might take the more shame to yourself, but it was no reason why your guest should wait your convenience."

"It must have been very bracing," said Felix, "and delightful to be a guest under such circumstances." He smiled as he recalled the

weary moments he had passed in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room, examining the well-known knickknacks while the lady made an elaborate toilet for his benefit.

"It was honest," said Miss Barbara with emphasis, "and it taught girls tidy ways. There was no lying on sofas or wearing of your dressing-gown all morning, when a neighbour might step in at any moment and spread your idle ways all over the parish."

This eulogy of the good old days carried them safely through the lower parts of the town, and it was still in full course when they reached that higher suburb where both ladies lived. Miss Barbara's two listeners received it very differently. To Miss Piper this code of manners sounded harsh and stern. It belonged emphatically to a past with which she had no sympathy, she who clung so pathetically to the fast-flying present. It confused her simple mind. Why should not Mrs. Henshaw take her ease on the sofa, and decline in any words she chose to minister to her unexpected guests? Miss Piper, who had the gentlest temper in the world, would have trudged many times over the long way, carrying that burden of detached parcels containing her trinkets, her faded flowers and finery, on the chance of being but once admitted behind that shut door. As for Philippa, that

beautiful creature who had promised to be her friend, would she not be equally charming, equally friendly, if she never wore a collar—or, for that matter, a gown at all? But here she lost herself in the perplexity of considering Philippa in this new light, and was suddenly recalled to the present by Felix handing over some of the stray packages she had unconsciously dropped during the argument.

They had reached Mrs. Gordon's door, and Felix was saying good night. He pleaded an engagement, and would not go in.

"It's an honest refusal, I assure you," he said, looking with his frank smile at Miss Barbara's doubtful face. "I left my cousin bothering himself about some business of mine, and must go back to him."

"Well," she said, "I believe you; though I heard enough to-night to make me not so good at believing as I was. Go and do your duty, and don't you fall into their ways. An old woman may say as much as that to a young lad like you without offence. You needn't look at me as if you were shocked, Miss Piper; we're old enough, both of us, to be his grandmother."

"Don't fall into their ways; don't fall into their ways." The words set themselves to a jingling chant as he lit his pipe, and slowly

retraced his steps. Into what ways? Philippa's ways were charming ones, though she had not been brought up in the Spartan school of Miss Barbara, charming in all, save and except in admitting the stranger to her hospitality. That was all that there was to disapprove about her. If she deviated from the truth, he did not know it; he preferred to believe her to be as honest as she was unconventional, as straightforward as she was kind. She never kept him waiting while she studied the subtleties of a toilet. She was always kind to him, not perhaps after the manner of the lady who might have been his grandmother, and who gave him good advice on that plea, but in her own wilful, odd, pleasant fashion. He wished for nothing better or more. The small conventionalities with which Mrs. Henshaw hedged her social life naturally did not trouble him as they troubled Miss Barbara. The phrase which had shocked her he took for what it was worth; it did not seem to him so very dreadful a fiat, unless it happened to be applied to himself. "Not at home" to him, Felix—while yet "at home" to this other man—that, if you like, would be a serious affair. But it had not come to that yet; this was a "way" into which Mrs. Henshaw was not likely to fall, so far as he was concerned. He fancied himself to be of some



little importance to her, of, perhaps, some very little importance to Philippa, too. She liked him better, for instance, than she liked the commercial person with the red whiskers. To be sure, that was not a matter to be greatly proud of; to be preferred to such an one was not a distinction to make one vain. Still, this man from nowhere had undoubtedly some advantages on his side. He had been invited—or had invited himself—to lunch or dinner at the Preciados every day since he came; while he, Felix, had not shared any of those little meals that he had so willingly undertaken to arrange with his landlord. He had not simply given a general order; he had, now and then, if not always, selected the little menu carefully, so that Philippa might not miss the sweet things and the fruit she preferred, and all this that another might share the feast to which he was not bidden!

His thoughts had worked themselves round once more to the old subject which already occupied too urgent a place in the foreground of his mind. He had tired in his day of some things, but he was not yet wearied of wondering at or conjecturing the relations between this beautiful girl, who was his friend, and this man for whom he had so fine a contempt. It was a subject full of danger to him. Ralph's fears

were not altogether groundless. Young Felix was more nearly ready to love Philippa than he had ever been in all the years he had known her, now that her cause seemed to need a champion. He had a good deal of native chivalry and of an Englishman's hatred of anything that savours of oppression, and he had a shrewd guess that some pressure was being put on the girl. It was impossible that she could consent to receive this man's attentions willingly; she had shown all too plainly how much she revolted from him. Ralph might have foreboded further trouble ahead could he have read his young cousin's mind as he paced the gaslit streets. From commiseration, from sympathy, it is such an easy step to something that is counted for love; that passes for it until, too late, light comes and the awakening from a dream.

As yet, salvation from such a fate was very possible. He had but thought with a quicker throb of his pulse that she was somehow suffering, and that he was called on to be her deliverer; but the very putting of the matter in plain words to himself seemed to bring a great enlightenment. He could not have told why, but all at once he felt a strong disinclination to return to his cousin and to that matter of business that had been his excuse to Miss Barbara. He went back to his hotel.

He was half-way upstairs when a new idea came to him, and he turned and went back to the hall. As a preliminary step towards the championship of Philippa, he called a waiter and asked him to bring the visitor's book. There, among several unreadable Spanish hieroglyphics, he soon discovered what he wanted.

"James P. Ferryman, Liverpool."

It was written so plainly, in a clear business hand, with a little flourish at the tail of the "n," that it seemed to stand alone on the page.

"A cotton lord," said Felix, shutting the book with a bang, and running lightly up the steps. "Nobody who hadn't signed a good many big checks in his day would think of cultivating such a tremendous signature. James P. Ferryman, your little dodges shall be discovered and circumvented, or I shall know the reason why."

He seemed to himself to have got on a great way already towards the defence of Philippa. It is something to know your adversary's name.

His room was in darkness, except for the borrowed light from the lamps outside. On his table there gleamed a little patch of whiteness, on which his eye lit at once. It was a note—a small three-cornered note, such as he had handled before. It was in Philippa's writing. He took it up with a new feeling of mingled

eagerness and pleasure. She was about, then, to appeal to him for help. He carried it to the window, too impatient to wait for the kindling of his lamp. Two lines, that was all.

“Please don’t come to our house just now—for a few days. I beg this of you as the greatest favour.—P. H.”

Philippa had scrawled it in haste, obeying the impulse of her hurt pride. Did she not wish the possible lover of to-morrow to look on at her struggle for freedom from the discarded lover of yesterday? Whatever she wished or did not wish, he had bound himself by that vow of allegiance to obey her. She had forbidden him to go to her; he would not go. She could not forbid him to think of her, and it was probable that, following the instinct of human nature, she would occupy his imagination as she had not yet occupied it.

He looked at the little note gravely, and he did not tear it up. He opened the French window, and stepped out on the balcony. There were still people walking about on the pavement below, but not so many as an hour before. The shops were shut. There was a faint, struggling moon that now and then appeared, showing the light surface of the fountain, and was again, next moment, hidden by the ragged, flying clouds. There was another

light besides that of the lamps. It advanced slowly ; it was old Domingo who carried it—he of the hooded cloak and long staff of office.

Felix noticed all these things, but without his usual alertness of impression ; he was thinking of something else.

## CHAPTER XI.

"I will bestow a breakfast to make you friends."

"BUT, father, that man!"

Mr. Ouvry was reading. He looked up with an exaggerated air of patience; he had supposed the subject at an end. He spoke wearily.

"I have already explained that I have invited Mr. Ferryman to lunch with us. Perhaps I didn't make my meaning plain."

"Oh yes, father," said Di distressfully; "it was not that."

"It doesn't seem to me such a great thing to propose in my own house," he said, looking at the wall as if in mild appeal. "A little act of hospitality to a stranger and a countryman. I am afraid, my child, you are a little selfish."

"Oh, padre!" she began, but she could get no further. Something seemed to choke her. Could it be true that she was selfish; and yet, could her father really find pleasure in the

company of this stranger? That seemed most difficult of all to believe.

"You'll notice that I said luncheon, Di," he went on, still in that patient, explanatory tone. "Quite an informal meal. You are a young housekeeper, and I don't wish to tax your powers too severely. A few little dishes, simple and well-cooked; that can't be very difficult to arrange."

"No, father." She came over and knelt down beside him, putting her hand on the worn leather cover of the chair. "It is not the trouble, you know, that would be nothing—nothing at all; it was only——"

"Only what, my child?"

"That I did not like him, this Mr. Ferryman. I saw him. And Philippa dislikes him, too, very much. She can't bear him. She thought he had no right to come."

"Philippa is a foolish girl, I'm afraid." Mr. Ouvry smiled indulgently, and patted the flushed cheek. "You and she are not so very wise; you must allow older people to judge. Mrs. Henshaw will come and support you; and you had better ask your friend, too. I dare say, in spite of her little prejudice, she will join us. That will make it all right, won't it?"

"Philippa won't come," said Di gravely.

"Well, well, one must make some allowance

for a pretty young lady's fancies. One must not expect too much from young people. But I thought your friend was a sensible girl, and not to be repelled by an unattractive appearance merely."

"It isn't his appearance only; that wouldn't matter, though he is ugly."

"I don't deny that there is a little lack of refinement; but one does not look for that in commercial circles." Mr. Ouvry shook his head softly, as who should say, "I am not exacting. I do not expect every one to reach my standard. I find Mr. Ferryman a person of great intelligence, however—quite remarkably well informed on many points."

Di listened in silence. Perhaps she had misjudged and been too hasty. It was true that she was not very wise; she was young and had seen nothing at all, yet she was struggling all the while with a feeling of disloyalty to Philippa. It seemed as if she was deserting her.

"You might drop a line to Malleson," her father went on. "I'm afraid we can't venture on Major Gibbs; no, we must not think of it; but Ralph will come."

"He is out of town," said Di quickly. "He went to Seville yesterday. I know, because I got a message with some books he sent me to read."



"Then I am afraid we have come to the end of our list. Brander hasn't returned yet, nor Carteret. Our little colony is sadly reduced this autumn. Well, it will give you the less trouble, my child. You can talk over a few little dishes with Concha, and let me know what you decide on. I'll see to the wine, of course."

"Very well, padre, I'll try to please you. To-morrow, you said?"

"Yes, to-morrow. You see there was nothing to be afraid of, was there?"

He placed his white, shapely hand on her little brown one, with a kind of playful pity. She was timid, but a good child. She stooped and kissed it softly, but she said nothing.

Felix Chester had not been named among the proposed guests. With every wish to be unselfish, Di could not induce her lips to utter his name. It would be going over to the enemy, indeed, to ask the young man to break bread with his rival—with the man, who, in some strange, unexplained fashion, held Philippa in his power.

Mr. Ouvry had not forgotten him, but there were reasons why he should be speedily rejected—excellent reasons. He should come another day with Major Gibbs and Barker, who was still at the sea; but with Mr. Ferryman, no. The

little party was got up to oblige Mr. Ferryman and Mrs. Henshaw, and it must pass off pleasantly, that was quite essential. Nothing of this was said to Di, and the talk ended with that little caress, which was good-humouredly received.

She rose and went to the kitchen where Concha reigned. The old woman was busy among her pots and pans, her gown tucked up, and a bright handkerchief tied under her withered chin. The afternoon sun streamed into the little room; the window was wide open; the soft air stirred the gay yellow papers that fluttered from every shelf. A stray beam smote the great red jar full of water that stood in one corner. Di went up to it, it was nearly as tall as herself; she put her hot hands against it and felt the sudden coolness run through all her veins.

Concha, with much show of zeal, was clattering among the pans and the rough clay, classic pots. Now and again she would stop to raise her hands and exclaim, with vehemence, "Holy Madonna! what laziness! A laziness to make one die! An hour, two hours, to go to the market and return; that is what one needs nowadays. And a stupidity! Never the thing that one orders, that one commands her to bring. It is well that the señorita has me, otherwise she

would starve; she would perish while that idle one creeps through the streets."

Deonys smiled. It was only Concha scolding the absent Pepita, who loved the hot bright streets and the gay shops. It was the one luxury of Concha's life to scold the little black-eyed maid. We have all our favourite indulgences; nobody minded Concha's sharp tongue, which would indeed have been missed in the house.

Deonys went and perched herself on a corner of the low table near the window. She began to talk of stews and sauces, of pimienta and tomatoes, and other cunning messes, beguiling the old woman into a vehement interest.

"And is it for the señorito, the impetuous young man with the yellow hair, who is the lover of the señorita downstairs—this feast?" she demanded, pausing in a dramatic attitude with a bit of pottery of antique shape in one hand.

"No, no, no," said Di, shaking the bread she had been idly crumbling out on the sill. "It is for—a friend of the padre's. The señorito is not coming at all."

She ran away before the old woman could ask any more questions. She hated to talk about it, and yet she must go and tell Philippa; that was certain. If she must play hostess to this man, Philippa must be told.

She had not seen her for a week or more, not since the moment of this unwelcome stranger's arrival. She had been afraid to meet him; afraid, somehow, even to go down the broad stair in case he should be ascending it. The thought of him filled her with a nameless, shuddering disgust.

She threw a light shawl over her head, and ran down quickly, as if there were danger in every lurking shadow. She had planned that she would ask for Philippa, and contrive to see her alone. Blake with the honest, severe face would understand. But this little diplomatic scheme came to nothing, for Mrs. Henshaw herself was hovering in the lobby and opened the door.

"Ah, it is you," she said, with a little sigh of relief, as if she had dreaded another visitor. "Come in, come in, my dear."

Her tone was kinder than usual, and there was a something softened and chastened in her whole appearance; it was as if her self-confidence had somehow oozed out. There was a difference in her very walk. The old rustle and sweep of her curling skirts were absent; the wonderful and subtle arrangements of her toilet, that had been an astonishment to Deonys, were banished. She wore a straight plain gown, and her hair was smoothed under a cap. For the first time, no

that youthful disguises were abandoned, one discovered what a handsome woman she was.

"I came to see Philippa."

"Ah, yes; but I have a word to say to you first. I thought of sending for you."

Deonys could do nothing but follow. She was led, without time to hesitate, into the salon with the green and gilded chairs. Philippa's corner by the window was empty.

Mrs. Henshaw sat down on a straight seat with an uncomfortable knobby back, and motioned Deonys to the sofa. It was as if she had said, "There are still luxuries in life for you; for me these things are over."

Di felt ill at ease. She had never before been so afraid of this good lady.

"Ah, what I have suffered—what I have suffered!" she began, pressing her handkerchief against her eyes. They were dry, but they looked worn and anxious, and the lines under them were dark.

"Have you been ill?" Di asked with sympathy.

"Ill? no." She removed her handkerchief. "I have my usual health. I have been able for my duties. The body obeys, but the mind and the heart—ah, it is there that one suffers."

"Philippa," Deonys began timidly. She did not know what to make of all this.

"She is well, she is not suffering. It is I on whom all the burdens fall."

"I am sorry you are in trouble."

Di felt this to be a very lame and halting reply, but, though she guessed at the source of the lady's distress, she shrank from listening to the recital of it.

"It is I on whom all the burdens fall," Mrs. Henshaw repeated. "I did it for her; and now she turns from me! You will speak to her? She will see you. My child confides in a stranger, and turns from her mother. And yet I am not ill—oh, no, I am not ill. And what does it matter that I suffer!" she cried shrilly. "Who will care?"

"Philippa will care; and we shall all be sorry. Papa, too, he is your old friend."

"Ah, your papa," said Mrs. Henshaw suddenly. She looked up with a strange, sharp light in her anxious eyes. "But for him—well, well, I can be silent; I can suffer in silence," she broke off. Then she added, with new vehemence, "But you must speak to Philippa; it is your duty. If you knew all, you would see it to be the least—the very least, that you ought to do. And to think that it is you to whom my child turns rather than to her own mother." She looked at the girl almost angrily.

"Philippa has told me nothing, nothing at

all," said Deonys, standing up. She was pale and there was a proud look on her sweet face. "You ought not to say I have taken her away from you, because it is not true."

"But you will go to her? You will make her listen to you?"

She passed by the girl's hurt words as if she never heard them. What cared she for reproaches so long as she gained her end?

"I will go to her because I love her."

"Yes, yes; I am sure you do. She has been very kind to you. She has made quite a friend of you; and if you persuade her to do as I wish, that will be a very good way to show that you—that you wish to help us all. One ought to be ready to sacrifice something for a friend," she ended, lighting on a moral maxim to strengthen her argument, and then continued—

"If I talk to her it may not be to say what you would like. But I think I understand. You wish her to give up this—gentleman." Di got out the word after a moment's hesitation.

"She think she is bound to him, I know; but that cannot make it right for her to marry him, since she dislikes him so much."

This little speech was delivered with some cheerfulness. If this was to be her mission she would undertake it almost willingly.

"Since you wish it so much, she will consent," she added confidently.

Mrs. Henshaw stared at her in dumb surprise.

"Give him up!" she cried at last. "Do you know what you are talking about, or are you only trying to frighten me?" She took hold of the girl's wrist in a grasp that hurt. "It is no time to joke," she said; "it is very bad taste. She must consent. It is the only way by which we can be saved. If there was another way, do you think I should take this, after what I have endured the last few days? Ah, if I had had my own that I was robbed of—yes, robbed of—this would never have happened, and my child would have loved me still. But I have kept silence. Do you know what that means—the bearing of a great wrong in silence?"

"Let me go; please, let me go," said Deonys, struggling to withdraw her hand. "I don't want to understand. I don't want to listen to anything more.

"You must," said Mrs. Henshaw more quickly, yet with firmness. "It is you who must save Philippa and me. It is only justice."

"I have nothing to do with it," she answered a little indignantly, longing to escape, yet held by the vehement eagerness of the speaker.

"Yes, you have. Philippa will be guided by



"You will go on until you will do what you tell her. And she is a stubborn little thing. If she is unhappy she will be her own devil. People marry for passion every day, and she will be rich, and get her own way. But the sooner she yields the better for he is a man who will not forget her goodness. He will remember it, and let her see that he remembers it."

Edith looked at her companion in amazement. Could she have heard aright? It was as if a wind which opened suddenly on the ugly and dark side of the world hitherto all unsuspected. Could there be women—mothers who were wicked like this?

"And you want her to marry a man who is like that?" she said staring at her. "You, who are her mother?"

Mrs. Henshaw's anxious eyes fell uneasily before that look. It was so open, so fearless, so astonished: that was the worst—it was so astonished.

"What else is there for her to do?" she asked with a faint tinge of shame.

"How can I tell? She can wait, I suppose. Why need she marry at all?"

"You girls are so romantic," Mrs. Henshaw spoke peevishly. "I was so once, too, in my day," she sighed: "but one lives down these things. There are other and stronger reasons

for marriage than love. You will understand it some day. None of your friends married for love. Not your mother, not any one."

"Don't talk of mamma, not you—not here," said Di, lifting one hand as if to ward off the words. "She was good."

"Do you know her story?"

"I will not hear it from you," Di said bravely, remembering her father's warning with a sudden sense of pain. If there was any story to tell, these were not the lips to repeat it.

"I don't propose to talk of her," Mrs. Henshaw answered coldly. "The subject is not a pleasant one to me; and, as I told you, I can keep silence. We were speaking of Philippa. Will you go to her?"

"I will go to her; but I can't talk to her as you wish. If she asks me, I will tell her that it is wrong, sinful, to marry any one you do not love. That is what I shall tell her."

She went away quickly, waiting for no rejoinder, and, somehow, the room was empty before the unready answer came to Mrs. Henshaw's lips. For a moment, a little moment, it seemed as if this young girl with the steadfast eyes had truth on her side; as if nothing else in all the world were worth bartering for love. There came with that, to this lady, a vision of a young face, noble and manly, a face unseen for

long years. It looked at her out of the past with a glance almost like that of the girl who had defied her. But visions are fleeting things. Quickly there came between it and her a mist of memories: disappointment, jealousy, long-treasured resentment. No wonder that she cried out bitterly that nobody marries for so slight a thing as love; that Philippa, too, must submit and do what others had to do before her. If she suffered, others had suffered, cried this mother, growing hard again as she paced the long room. Was not she suffering now? and her child, for whose good she had worked, had turned against her. Philippa must yield; she had lost the ally on whose help she had counted, but she could fight alone. Philippa must surrender.

Di went straight to her friend. Her eyes were blazing with a new light. Philippa was in bed, but sitting up with a shawl pinned about her. She was busy examining some trinkets, which she was taking one by one out of an old box; but Di noticed nothing of this.

"Oh, Philippa," she said, "you won't promise; you won't let them make you promise!"

Philippa laughed.

"So you have come at last, my pretty one. Did you not think of your poor sick friend till to-day? Why don't you ask after my health?"

"You are not ill," said Di, experiencing a sudden chill. This glowing, beautiful creature did not look like an oppressed maiden tyrannized over by her friends.

"Ill? I am very near it. A day more of this dreadful bed, and I should be a fit subject for your best nurse. Think of mamma insisting on my carrying out the illusion. Wasn't that a cruel turning of the tables? The slops and the gruel took away all the picturesqueness of the situation. They have conquered me. Next week we should have arrived at the drugs and the tonics. That decided matters. Behold me convalescent, Di."

"And what follows?" said Di, with a touch of scorn in her clear voice.

"It follows that I proceed to the drawing-room for change of air, and that I am presently pronounced well enough to receive visitors, you first and dearest of them."

"I can't come."

"You mean you can't come unless you can have me all to yourself? You shall have me all to yourself, Di, every bit of me. We'll not even admit good little Miss Piper to our duet, though we did sign that bond of friendship with her."

"Philip, I can't understand you," said Di wistfully; "you are too quick for me."

Never mind. I am glad you can be gay ; only——”

“Only,” said Philippa sadly, “it’s a sorry kind of gaiety. Di, Di, you are a girl, too. Don’t you understand another girl better than that?”

In a moment Di had come forward and thrown her arms about her friend, tender arms that would cling there in spite of all.

“Oh, my dear,” she said, “don’t let them make you do things that are not right.”

“I have done plenty without coercion.” Philippa shook her head. “Don’t imagine me an innocent and amiable angel, ready to yield to anybody’s dark suggestions. I need only yield to my own to be as bad as possible.”

“Then you will not do this thing?”

“If, by ‘this thing,’ you mean marry that man, I will never do it, never, never!” said Philippa firmly. “Was that what you meant I was to promise?”

“Yes.”

“Then I promise it here, now. I promise, that no one will make me do it.”

“I am glad,” said Di simply, yet she sighed. “I have been listening to your mother.”

“But not agreeing with her?”

“I told her I would never say you ought to do it.”

"Poor mamma," said Philippa lightly; "that was a blow to her. She counted on you to take her side; but you took mine instead, you good little Di."

"I should like best never to have known anything about it," said Di honestly; "but perhaps that is selfish."

It seemed very likely that she might have been selfish, though she had not thought of it till her father had pointed it out.

"Philippa, I must tell you something."

"Yes, do. I want so much to get away from this hateful subject."

"But this is what you will not like."

"I shall like anything better than my own thoughts."

"He is coming to lunch with us to-morrow."

"Who is 'he'?"

"Mr. Ferryman. Papa has asked him."

"Oh, is that all? I knew that. It is part of the plan to get me to consent."

"The padre would have nothing to do with such a plan," said Di, with a touch of pride; "you must not think it."

"My little one," said Philippa, smiling, "he thinks nothing at all, except that I am a very foolish girl to refuse so great an offer."

"He doesn't understand. He means to be kind."

"I know that. I like your father. He thinks perhaps that by his showing some attention to this man, I may be led to think better of him. But nothing will make me do that."

"When you have given him his answer he will go away," said Di soothingly. "And then it will be all as it used to be."

Philippa laughed.

"How little you understand," she said. "My answer won't make him move one step, not one; he will not go away because of that. Perhaps if he got his money back—but I don't know. Oh, Di, I must tell you about it. I didn't mean to worry you with my troubles, but if you only knew what a comfort it is to have some one to talk to again, after the soup, and the gruel, and the lumps in the mattress, and mamma's anxious face and Blake's solemn one!"

She laughed, but there were tears in the bright, beautiful eyes that made Di say quickly, suppressing her dislike—

"Yes, tell me."

"It was two years ago," said Philippa, closing her hand and softly beating time to her words on the coverlet, "two years. I was not a child, you see—indeed, I never had a childhood—I was always grown up, and 'out' ever since I can remember. Well, all that is nothing to the point, except that it will prove to you that

I did the thing with my eyes open. We were living in London then, and to live in London at all one must have money."

"Is every one so rich, then?"

"You must either be rich, or you must pretend to be. If you have only a very little money you may just as well have none at all. That was our case, and the pretending, even if it is ever so well done, only lasts for a time. Besides, we weren't good at it—mamma and I—I will say that for us. We both hated it; and I don't think there were two greater cowards in London that season. But what can one do, Di? One must live; and our money affairs had gone wrong for the time. It was only for the time, but presently people got tired of supporting us on promises, and then—this man came." She paused, and went on hurriedly, "I never cared for money; but there are things one must have, and there was disgrace facing us. You cannot understand it, Di; it is a world removed from anything you have known; but it was an ugly enough alternative. And this man had so much! He was willing and eager to give it, too, only he had his bargain to make."

"That was mean," said Di. She was trying to put herself in the other's place, to argue as Philippa had argued. But on all this shifting ground, where she could find no firm foothold,



it was a comfort to find one point where they could meet. "It was mean and ungenerous."

"The commercial spirit, I suppose," said Philippa bitterly. "Nothing for nothing. He understands how to barter. And he was modest enough then in his demands; he would wait. It was only a promise. Oh, Di, the words were so easily said! I don't think they were even spoken. Just a consenting silence, and there was everything plain and straight and smooth before us."

"He will not keep you to it. He cannot."

"So I thought once. We went away after that, and we travelled everywhere, while he stayed behind in that hateful England. I felt safe. I thought that the sea would roll between us for ever. Last spring, when we were in London, I was afraid, but he never appeared. Then we came here. It did not seem as if a person who had tallow or beer or soda water, or whatever it is, to manufacture, would care to leave that charming pursuit, even for my sake. And yet, here he is. It's a fine proof of constancy, isn't it, Di?"

"You must pay back the money."

Di slid from the edge of the bed, where she had been seated, and began to pace the room, unconsciously pausing now and again to set the shabby ornaments straight, or to lift the lids

of Philippa's little pots and boxes. She had travelled a long, long way into knowledge in the last hour; it was as if she had suddenly grown old, and had had all her experiences of life crowded into this little space. There was a great deal that she must strive to forget, but in the meantime she could not arrange her thoughts. Something must be done—some plan made to help this other girl, who was her friend.

"My dear," said Philippa, who was watching her with an irrepressible smile, "you will find no hidden treasures. My possessions are all hopelessly paltry; there's nothing that would fetch sixpence at a sale. See, I've been looking over these." She pointed to the trinkets scattered all round her. "I never wear them. But what would be the use of the trifle they would fetch? My grandmother's hair woven into bracelets wouldn't command a handsome sum, or be counted an ornament if anybody could be persuaded to buy them. And where's the money to come from? He will exact his pound of flesh, this merchant in tallow."

"I can't talk about it," Di said, straying back to the bed.

She looked at the trinkets absently. Philippa was touching them slowly. There was, as she

had said, nothing of any value. A string of baby coral, one or two girlish trinkets, some Genoa filigree, and Venice beads.

"It is all as worthless as my life," she said. "I've nothing to sell. I've been bought myself, that is all."

"I can't talk about it," Di repeated. "Something must be done. You must let me go away; I am tired."

"It is I who have tired you with my melancholy tale," said Philippa with compunction.

"You will wish you had never seen me."

"No, not that; but indeed I must go."

She sped upstairs, fear lending her wings. She heard the steady pace of a foot that trod the green and gold salon, past which she stole softly, dreading another interview with Mrs. Henshaw. She could talk or listen no more.

Yet there was one little word still to say.

It was evening, and shadow was gaining fast on sunlight in that race which they nightly run. One might almost have fancied that the sounds which rose from the Puerta were less vivacious, less spontaneous, as if the day, too, were tired, as tired as the girl who stood by the window. Outside there was a timid fluttering of wings, a silent appeal of bright bird eyes, but her hands were empty.

"Father," she said by-and-by, "I want to

ask you something. Have I any money—any money that is my own?”

Mr. Ouvry was preparing to go out, to visit the Athenæum and take a glance at the latest scientific journals; he was a patron of literature and science. The question gave him a disagreeable shock, perhaps because it was so unexpected.

“Money of your own?” he repeated. “Have you any wants that I fail to supply?”

“None,” she said eagerly. “I have everything I wish. But I thought perhaps——” She faltered. “I did not know, I thought perhaps mamma——”

“Your mother had nothing but what her guardian chose to give her while she lived with him before her marriage, nothing afterwards that she did not owe to me.”

He spoke frigidly. He would answer all her questions, but he made it apparent that he strongly disapproved of them.

“Who put this thought into your mind, Deonys?”

“No one,” she answered quickly.

He looked at her distrustfully, but it was impossible to doubt the perfect candour of her clear eyes.

“Oh, padre, forgive me. I meant no harm. It was not for myself.”

"It is perhaps not well for you to question me," Mr. Orvvy continued; "but I have nothing to conceal. I am a very poor man. I keep nothing for myself, nothing that you do not share. And you shall have it all when I am gone, Deonys." He spoke gently; he recognized the pithos of the situation. "It is not long to wait. I am growing old. You shall have it all then."

"Oh, don't speak like that," said the girl, her tears brimming over.

She sat down in her little low chair, and covered her face with her hands. The wings fluttered nearer now, bold red feet clasped the sill of the window, and impatient beaks made little dabs, pecks and dumb appeals at the glass, but she never lifted her head. Her pets flew home unfed; and the shadows crept up and looked in at her instead. For the race was ended, and night was the victor.

## CHAPTER XII.

"A veray parfit gentil knight."

FELIX was on the same day taking an afternoon walk—a young gentleman of leisure, bent on anything that promised to offer some amusement—when his eye lighted on a prominent placard. There, set forth in large capitals, was the announcement of a *función* in the bull-circus. The season of bull-fights was not until spring, but this was a special and separate performance, given on some ground which the advertisement fully explained, but which he failed to comprehend. His Spanish was limited, but the main fact was plain enough. It was also stated that royalty was to grace the show.

He noted the hour carefully, and found that he was just in time to take his place. He made up his mind without difficulty to attend. It was the thing to do, and, in the absence of other interests, he was ready to entertain hospitably

any new sensation. Philippa had forbidden him to go to her, and this privation must be made up for somehow. He was in the mood to believe that the entertainment was specially arranged for his consolation.

The spectacle began at three o'clock, and a little before that hour arrived he had secured his ticket and taken his seat. He had a pleased sense of excitement, as he surveyed the immense crowd that filled the large, low building. Many thousands of people were there—a sea of faces lit with eager expectation, hands gesticulating, voices laughing, shouting, sending greetings across the arena.

Felix felt himself lifted on this wave of enthusiasm. He told himself that it was a happy chance that led his steps to this spot. Among the many holiday-makers he recognized one or two who were unmistakably English. There were ladies of the party; one of them had a note-book, and busied herself with rapid sketching of profiles. The band struck up and discoursed gay music. It was altogether a brilliant gathering—a glimpse of national life it would have disappointed him to miss.

Then the trumpet sounded, and the procession, which is never less than picturesque, began. Felix leaned eagerly forward, and there passed before him a vision of gorgeous colour

and flashing gold and silver : men of proud bearing on horseback and on foot, who bent before the royal seat ; the glitter of lances ; the noise of music ; the slow march of feet. It was like some fairy scene conjured up by an Aladdin's wand ; a moment it was there, the next it had vanished. A thrill, which communicated itself to Felix, now passed through the vast company, then every one settled down, and absolute silence prevailed ; the business of the hour had begun.

It is no part of this story to describe the horrors of a bull-fight—that spectacle which every tourist feels it to be his duty to see, undeterred by the warnings that are surely not spared him. Felix, who took a most healthy interest in the sports of his native country, was prepared to be critical and judicial, but yet lenient and tolerant towards the practices of this less favoured land. He was destined to remain but a brief time in that mind. By the time the first of the six bulls, that were doomed to die for the amusement of this holiday crowd, had been dragged out of the arena, he had left the circus, horrified, sickened, disgusted, vowing vengeance against Ralph, against Baedeker and Murray, against any one and every one who had not forcibly held him back from witnessing this degrading and brutal exhibition. No words



were strong enough to express his indignation, his sense of contempt for the baseness and ferocity of this national amusement. His head ached, his heart beat in angry throbs; he felt tired, angry, disgusted, all at once, but chiefly disgusted.

He walked almost without thought of where he was going to the Recoletos, and threw himself on a bench under the trees. It was the hour of the evening promenade, and that portion of society that had absented itself from the circus was being driven slowly up and down the long avenue. He recognized the fair, sad face of the young queen, and he thought of the English ladies he had left behind him. Was that young lady, who had the sketch-book, still busy with her pencil, over the agony of a dying bull, perhaps, or the last struggle of its victim? he wondered. All the English blood in him boiled as he thought of the horses. For a long time afterwards he could not look at the sorriest London cab-hack without a sickening recollection of the butchery he had witnessed. There was some manliness—some fair play in a chase after fox or stag. There, at least, the hunted creature had a chance of life; but the ring—what better was it than a gigantic slaughter-house? His mind was angrily full of the subject; he could not wrench his thoughts

from it. For this youth took everything hotly, finding many windmills to challenge in the course of his journey through life—a knight, be it said for him, who was always on the side of the injured. What did Ralph mean—Ralph, who had the public ear—what did he mean by sitting supinely, and letting this great abomination go undenounced?

While he was entertaining his anger and mentally addressing his cousin in the language of reproach, two people, busy with emotions not less strong, were walking on the side-path behind his seat. There were many others who walked there; but these two were English, and they spoke in their own tongue, without fear of being understood.

Philippa had quickly forsaken her pretence of illness. When Di left her she rose and dressed, and slipped out of the house unnoticed. There was a little coldness between mother and child; and Mrs. Henshaw had refrained from going to her daughter's room, keeping solitary possession of the drawing-room, her heart full of bitter thoughts and memories hardly less bitter.

Philippa was meanwhile walking in the Recoletos with the man of whom she had spoken to Di in such scornful terms. She was closely veiled, and wore the simplest of her simple

dresses; but there was no mistaking her tall, straight figure, or the proud carriage of her head. The interview—Felix guessed afterwards—must have been a stormy one; but he never knew what had passed between them. The first thing that aroused his attention was the sound of an English voice—a voice high-pitched and clear, which seemed to come somewhere from behind him.

“I ought to know that voice,” he thought. “Where have I heard it before?” Then he listened idly, and he heard these strange words—

“If you succeed in cajoling him as you cajoled me, I’ll have the pleasure of showing him those letters you are so anxious to get back. Now you know why I refuse to part with them.”

“Where have I heard that delightful person before?” Felix asked himself carelessly. “His accent and his sentiments seem quite familiar to me.”

He glanced round him, but he saw only a group of Spanish ladies, attended by their cavaliers. There was a rustle of trailing skirts, a faint breath of perfume, dark eyes looked at him languidly. There was no one to whom the wandering voice could possibly belong. Then

the passing horses caught his eye, and his mind went back to the spectacle he had left, where the trembling animals awaited the fate they were powerless to resist. He remembered the sea of faces, lit with an almost fiendish excitement at the sight of the blood that soaked the sands of the arena. There was something tigerish, surely, in the nature that could take pleasure in such a spectacle. He had quite forgotten the words he had heard, when his attention was again arrested.

Philippa and her companion had walked on a few steps, but they had now turned, and were once more within earshot of the bench where he sat.

"You choose to be insulting because I am in your power," she said, with a ring of passion in her voice. "Have you not humiliated me enough already?"

"Will you tell me that you don't intend to marry him, if you can?"

She maintained a proud silence; and he continued, with the brutal frankness which is the anger of such a nature—

"You need not try to deny it. You will treat him as you have treated me. You will take what he has to offer; and if any one who is richer turns up, any one who is a still greater

fool, and will make a better dupe, you will fling him off, too, as you——”

At this juncture a young man jumped up, and confronted them—a young man whose blue eyes were blazing with a wrathful light.

“Miss Henshaw,” he said gravely and low, putting a great constraint on himself, “I only this moment recognized your voice, and I thought”—he eyed her companion dangerously—“I thought you might like to know I was at hand.”

“No doubt, by appointment,” said Mr. Ferryman, with a sneer. “We were talking of you just now.”

“You do me too much honour,” said Felix, with much outward show of politeness, but with wrath in his heart.

He burned to knock the fellow down on the spot, and it was to his credit that he only turned to Philippa, and said quietly—

“May I walk home with you?”

Philippa was white to the very lips. She could not have spoken; but before she could even bow her head in assent, her companion struck in—

“She will go with you fast enough. She has been condescending to explain her reasons for throwing me over; but I dare say you know

them already. As for the letters, Miss Henshaw, no doubt this gentleman would like to look at them; they will prepare him for what he may expect in his turn."

He had been addressing Philippa, but now he looked at Felix. The two men regarded each other with ill-concealed hate. Love of Philippa had little enough to do with this feeling on either side. It may be questioned whether Mr. Ferryman knew the meaning of that high word. He admired Philippa as he admired his blue china and his marquetry; he had imagined he could buy her much in the same way that he had bought these other adornments; and he only longed the more to conquer her because she had thwarted and withstood him. His dislike to Felix came to him as an instinct, and may be summed up in a word or two. Felix was young, good-looking, and, sharpest sting of all, he was a gentleman, and a gentleman who, whether willingly or not, stood in his light. As for Felix, all his manhood rose in revolt against one who could treat a woman—any woman, were she the poorest and meanest of her sex—as this man had treated Philippa. He was not thinking of her now as his friend—as the girl whom he had almost persuaded himself that he loved. Could

it be that the process of disenchantment had already begun?

"We can spare you any further remarks," he said curtly; adding, with a meaning look, "I'll have a word with you again."

Then he drew Philippa's arm within his own, and led her away.

"Please get me a glass of water," she said when they had gone a few steps.

He took her to a seat, and darted to a stall not far off, coming back with a tumbler in his hand.

He stood in silence while she drank the contents. When he had restored the glass, he came back to her, and said—

"Do you feel able to go home now?"

"Home? Oh yes," she said, starting up; "mamma will miss me."

They went on again. Felix longed to utter some commonplace remark, but he remained dumb. His brain seemed to be asleep, his mind a blank. He tried to remember where he had been, what he had seen; then all at once the recollection of the bull-fight flashed across him again, and he plunged into the subject. He remembered afterwards that he must have given her a somewhat startling account of the spectacle; but his hot denunciation fell on her

ears unheeded. In the middle of one of his angriest sentences she looked up at him ; there was pain and shame in the beautiful eyes, which seemed hardly able to meet his.

"How much did you hear?" she asked abruptly.

"Nothing—from you—that you could wish unheard," he answered quickly. "You met his impertinences with the silence they deserved. As for——"

"As for Mr. Ferryman, he had a right to complain. I have treated him badly." She paused.

"Don't defend him," he said with haste; "nothing can excuse him."

"But if I have done wrong, I have been punished for it." She averted her head, but he could see that her lips were quivering.

He felt an immense compassion for her, that he longed to put in words ; but, as if she divined his intention, she drew herself up again, and said, with a laugh—

"You did not know I should submit so tamely to be scolded and raged at, did you, and—and misrepresented?"

She had thrown back her veil. A burning blush succeeded her paleness, but she looked at him steadily.



"I did not give his words a passing thought," Felix made answer with all the carelessness he could assume—which was not much. "Or if I did," he added more truthfully, "it was only to resent them on your behalf."

He felt that he was escaping but awkwardly from the difficulty. He was inwardly chafing against the restraints of speech between man and woman. Why was it not possible—why would it be an impertinence on his part to assure her frankly: "I acquit you of all designs upon me; of the schemes to entrap me into matrimony, of which this delightful person accuses you"? Why was it equally impossible for him to say now, what would have been easily said twenty-four hours before—"Marry me, and give me the right to defend you from the faintest shadow of reproach"?

He felt no impulse to make this appeal; he only felt that he would give anything to restore to her her self-respect, and to make her forget that he had been an unwilling listener to this disclosure.

"I will tell you why I bore it as I did," Philippa went on proudly. "Mr. Ferryman seemed to think you would be interested in our correspondence."

He made a quick gesture of dissent, but she paid no heed to his protest.

"There were letters—love-letters, I suppose you might call them—that passed between us some years ago. I promised to marry him then, but now—I have changed my mind. All this can't be very interesting to you, and I don't say it to excuse myself. But——"

( "You had the best of reasons for what you have done, I am sure," he made haste to say. It was a new position to him, this of confessor, and he was aware that he played his part but crudely. He was not, in truth, very comfortable. Somewhere in the background of his thoughts there was a faint sense of distrust and disapproval; but, to do him justice, he did not encourage it or dwell on it; he only remembered that he had vowed to stand to her in the place of brother.

"I wish I could help you," he said impetuously.

She shook her head.

"You can't do that. Never mind me," she said, with her old smile. "I have been scolded, but I told you I deserved it—partly, at least. I am only sorry that any friend of mine should have suffered with me. If you can forget the rudeness to yourself——"

"As far as I am concerned, it is all forgotten," he said with assumed lightness, as he parted

with her at the door. He said nothing of that further explanation which he intended to have with Mr. Ferryman. He went home more grave than when he had set out. The bullfight was forgotten. Here, surely, was an enterprise more worthy of his steel, a wrong to redress more clamant than any that had so occupied his thoughts an hour or two before.

END OF VOL. I.







